

# Using Service Design in Cross-culture Customer Service

## - A Study Case of Finnish Integration Training Service

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2015 Leppävaara



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- A Study Case of Finnish Integration Training Service**

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SID Programme  
Master's Thesis  
March, 2015

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Year	2015	Pages	74
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This thesis focuses on cross-culture customer service. The importance of the cultural element in customer service is discussed. Culture has become an important element that explains why the customers have different needs. Cross-cultural customer service has been a trend in the service industry.

Company X is the case company in the thesis because it is a typical service organization that provides service to multi-culture customers. Their main service, Finnish integration training, is serving the immigrants in Finland, who come from all over the world. This service is the main focus of this thesis.

The service study in this report is led by service-dominant logic. The concept of co-creation is implemented to support the study. Culture related theories are the main theoretical foundations to support the cultural study. Service design process and methods are the main means to explore the service development opportunities and generate development ideas.

Customer interviews were carried out to collect feedback from customers. Field work was carried out with a member of staff of company X. The service design process was gone through with the member of company X's staff and several service design methods were used to explore the service problems and create development ideas. The co-creation concept was implemented by working together with the service provider and the customers to generate development suggestions.

The development suggestions are generated from two aspects: enhance current services and implement new service solutions. The company X's teachers should study more culture theories and take cultural differences more into consideration in their work. Company X could have better cooperation with partners to improve the service quality and provide more services to meet the needs of the customer. The basic purpose of the suggestions is to help company X identify the importance of culture in the service, understand the customer's cultural background, and improve service quality.

Key words: customer service, cross-culture service, multi-culture customer, service design process, service design method, cultural dimensions, Finnish integration service.

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## 1 Introduction

### 1.1 Background

Nowadays there is a common understanding that a service provider must understand customers' needs and provide services according to their needs. Why do the customers have different needs? Because they have different ages, genders, senses of worth, or personalities? One important reason is that they have different cultural backgrounds. The customers' cultural backgrounds affect their behaviors and demands quietly but deeply.

In current customer service industry, some service providers only face to very specific customers, but most service providers have to provide services to the customers all over the world. Although many service providers know the saying of we must meet customers' needs, it is still challenging for them to know why customers have different needs and what they really need. Especially when a service organization wants to develop the market in a new region, or has foreigners as its target customers, it is essential to have deep understanding on the cultures of the region and people. Cross-cultural customer service has been a mega trend in service industry.

In Finland, TE Toimisto- employment office has cooperated with education organizations to prepare an integration plan service for the new immigrants who come from all over the world. The integration plan service is an important support for the immigrants to have a smooth landing and live well in Finland. This integration plan service includes a series of service. The Finnish integration training service is a most important part of the integration plan.

In this thesis the case company - company X is an education service organization who is providing Finnish integration training service in Finland. Company X is used as the name of the study company in this report. The real name of the study company is hidden because there has not been an official approval from the study company yet for wide release. In this thesis, the cross-cultural customer service will be discussed and research will be carried out on the case company - company X.

Personally I have been the customer of Finnish integration training service. As a foreigner, I have also experienced the interesting things and difficulties when I was having the service. That's why I choose this topic and try to close the cultural gap to make the service better. Seven years ago, before arrived in Finland, I have heard Finnish integration training service and felt that this service was quite useful for the foreigners in Finland. At that time, there were lots of positive feedbacks as it gave the immigrants the basic skills to live in Finland. During seven years in Finland, I have received more and more feedbacks about this service

mainly from the customers and their families. The feedbacks were different from different customers. Especially when I asked the people from different countries, the feedbacks were quite different.

Two years ago, I had training at company X for several months. It was a good chance to have a personal experience on the service. I had much more direct interactions with the service and understood more about the service. During the training, I met some staff in company X. I received their feedbacks from another point of view about how they wanted to develop their service and what they expected from the customers.

The feedback from company X's staff is very important because they have a big picture of how the whole service is running and what they are expected to make the service running smoothly. A service contains the interactions from both sides - the service provider and the customers. The cooperation between service provider and customers is important.

## 1.2 The Aim of the Thesis

This thesis aims to analyze how the cultural elements effect on the service quality; promote cross-culture customer service in the study case; provide suggestions to the study company for the service development.

It is understandable that the customers' expectations are quite different. The customers come from different countries and have different cultural backgrounds. They have different definitions of a good service based on their cultural backgrounds. The word "good service" can have different meanings in different cultures. The service organization must have a basic understanding of different cultures. A service cannot fulfill all the cultural expectations, indeed, but a service provider can keep the cultural thinking in mind to avoid misunderstanding as much as possible.

Based on the above reasons, this thesis aims to have a deep understanding of expectations from the students and company X; analyze how cultural elements effect on service and what could be done better from cultural perspective; promote cross-culture customer service in company X; and then provide some suggestions for development.

### 1.3 Background: Case Company X and Integration Training Service

#### *Case Company*

Company X is a training organization who offers comprehensive education for customers. Company X provides variant types of training service. In Finland, Finnish Integration training service is a main part of their service. (Company X 2014.)

In Finland, company X cooperates with TE Toimisto (employment office) to provide Finnish Integration Service to immigrants. Company X signs cooperation contract with Finnish employment office, and gets authorization from the Finnish employment office to provide Integration Training Service to the immigrants. In capital area, the Integration Training is carried out in Helsinki, Espoo and Vantaa. The immigrants could apply for the training in their own region. (Company X 2014.)

Besides the core training service - Finnish language course, Finnish Integration Service also includes various types of courses for the immigrants who have different backgrounds and needs. For instance, Integration Service provides literacy course for the immigrants who came from less-developed countries and had limited education before; Integration Service provides business course for the immigrants who want to engage in business related industry in Finland, for example running their own business, working in banking or accounting positions; Integration Service also provides transport training for the immigrants who want to work in transport industry, for example working as a public transport driver. Integration Service also has specific courses for the immigrants who came from the same language area, for example there is specific course for Estonian and Russian immigrants; the teacher who speaks Russian communicate with the students efficiently. (Company X 2014.) All the courses in Integration Service will strengthen the students' Finnish language skill comprehensively or specifically, according to the needs of the students.

#### *Integration Training Service*

In Finland, employment office authorizes education organizations to provide integration training service to new immigrants. The purpose of this service is to give immigrants the basic and essential skills to live in Finland, furthermore to work or have education in Finland. Once the immigrants gain the proper skills, they will be able to contribute to Finland society and benefit themselves.

The training is intended for unemployed adult immigrants. Generally, the integration training is established in 4 levels according to the Finnish language skill of the students. Through the selection test at Testi Piste (testing center), the students will be categorized to the appropri-

ate training level. New courses start about every 60 days, in which case it is possible to start a suitable level of Finnish language studies quickly. (Company X 2014.)

The training consists of four 60-day modules; slowly progressive education in the last module length is 90 days. Each student's educational path is different depending on the baseline. During the training, students study Finnish language, working skills and information about Finnish society. After the training, students will master the basic Finnish language. It is full day training from Monday to Friday between 9:00am to 15:00pm. (Company X 2014.)

Before starting the training, the immigrants will be guided to understand the content and process of the training. The training is a full time class. The students should attend the class on time every day. The unemployment benefit will be paid according to the student's attendance situation.

The core content of this service is Finnish language courses for the immigrants. When a new immigrant arrives in Finland, the language is always the first barrier for him or her. The education organizations will provide a several months' Finnish language course to the new immigrant. The full time course will give the student a sufficient Finnish language environment. After several months' Finnish language courses, the new immigrant will gain the basic skills to speak, listen, read and write Finnish. The Finnish language is an essential skill for immigrants to communicate with others, adapt the society, know about the country, and furthermore have education and work in Finland.

Besides the Finnish language course, this service provides more interesting and useful contents such as introduction about the society, daily life, culture, history and nature of Finland. The purpose of these contents is to allow the students to really know about Finland from different aspects.

The teachers in the school will organize exercise activities for students. For example, the teacher will organize a class to visit museums to know about the history, technology and art in Finland; to visit parliament to know about the politics in Finland; to visit hospitals to know about how to book an appointment with doctors and how the process is going in the hospitals; to visit libraries to understand how to borrow and return a book; and hike in forest to know about the nature in Finland. The purpose of these activities is to let the students have the basic knowledge and information about Finnish history, culture, daily life and nature. Through these activities, the immigrants will be able to open the door, go out and see the colorful life in Finland.



During the training period, the teachers will also provide career guidance to guide the new immigrants how to find job in Finland. The career guidance contains the general information about labor market in Finland, what are the essential skills and knowledge to find a job in Finland, where and how to gain those skills and knowledge, what are the main sources to search for the information about open positions, how to apply for a job, and what to prepare for an interview in Finland. Having an integration training and unemployment benefit is a temporary solution for the immigrants. The purpose of providing the career guidance is to help the immigrants gain more practical skills and knowledge to live better and independently, and furthermore bring more contribution to the labor market and society in Finland.

The students will have language skill assessment before graduation and get the certificate to prove their language level. The language skill assessment will examine the speaking, listening, reading and writing skill of the students. A score will be given by the teacher. Although the scores might be different according to the different Finnish language levels of students, each of them will receive a Finnish language certificate to prove their language level. The language certificate will help them for the further education and career in Finland.

#### *Immigration in Finland*

According to Statistics Finland (Official Statistics of Finland 4.2014), 31,940 persons immigrated to Finland from foreign countries during 2013. The number is 660 higher than in the previous year and the highest during Finland's independence. In 2013, the Finnish Immigration Service issued a total of 20,076 permits to people coming from countries outside the EU (The Finnish Immigration Service 2014).

In past 14 years, generally the number of immigration increased stably. After 2006, the increase tendency had a slight acceleration (Official Statistics of Finland 4.2014). Illustration 1 shows increase tendency of immigration in Finland from 2000 to 2013 (Official Statistics of Finland 4.2014).

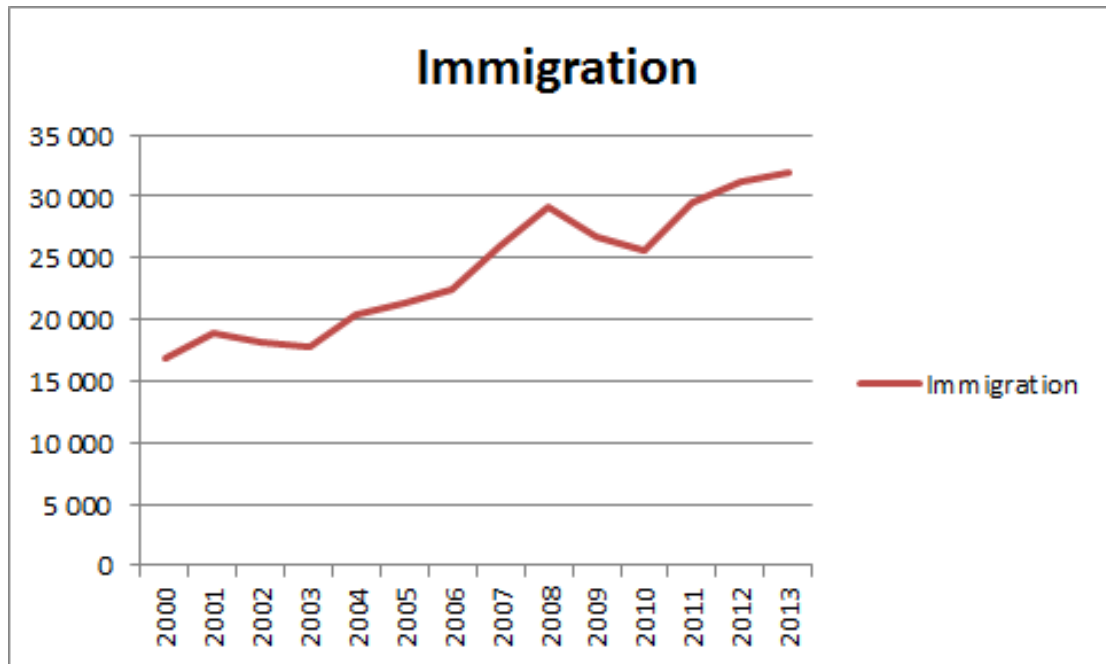


Illustration 1 2000 - 2013 Immigration Tendency in Finland (Official Statistics of Finland 4.2014)

A lot of concerns emerged as the tendency required. The economic, social, and political aspects of immigration have caused concerns regarding ethnicity, economic benefits, job positions, settlement patterns, impact on upward social mobility, crime, and voting behavior. At the meanwhile, the immigrants are also bringing benefits and opportunities to the country. The immigrants are bringing labor force, information and knowledge, commercial opportunities, purchasing power and multi-cultures to Finland.

As the two sides of a coin, the immigration has positive and negative effects on society, economy, and polity of Finland. How to convert the negative effects to positive and utilize the positive parts has been considered by the government of Finland. There have been many strong supports from different departments of the society to help immigrants make contribution to the country and benefit themselves. The supporting services give the immigrants the basic and essential information and skills to settle down in Finland, find job, have further education, develop professional skills, take care of family members - all in all, have equal rights to live in Finland. Kotoutumiskoulutus - Integration Training Service is one of the supporting services.

#### *Integration plan and integration assistance*

After immigrants arrive in Finland, TE Toimisto- employment office has prepared an integration plan for them. This integration plan includes different types of service and it is support-

ing the immigrants' "growth" in Finland for a long term. The new immigrants can find integration plan service information on employment office's website and they can register and apply for the service and relevant training if they need. If their condition can meet the criteria, they will be informed to have an assessment and participate the training.

The first step of having an integration plan is to do an initial assessment. The immigrant can ask an employment office for an initial assessment. In this assessment, the immigrant's situation - for instance working and education status, family situation, and his or her application for various services will be examined. (TE Toimisto 2014.)

The initial assessment may include several steps:

- an initial interview
- a test of applicant's language skills
- an assessment of applicant's other skills

The immigrant can make the integration plan together with the employment office or the local authorities. This plan will generate the services that immigrant will need to support his or her integration and employment. The plan usually contains participation in integration training, a Finnish language course, labor market training, or other education or training that suit the applicant.

When an immigrant has registered as a jobseeker at the employment office, he or she can apply for an unemployment benefit from the Social Insurance Institution - Kela or an unemployment fund. During the valid period of the immigrant's integration plan, the unemployment benefit will be paid as integration assistance. If the applicant is a full-time student or do not accept a full-time job for some reason, no unemployment benefit will be paid. (TE Toimisto 2014.)

If the employment office cannot find a job for the applicant, he or she will be offered another service - have a full-time Finnish language course which is the main content of integration training service. (TE Toimisto 2014.)

#### 1.4 Research Approach

Service-dominant logic is the fundamental to carry out research in this report. The foundational proposition of S-D logic is that organizations and markets are fundamentally concerned with exchange of service - the applications of competences (knowledge and skills) for the benefit of an organization. It can be understood as, service is exchanged for service; all firms

are service firms; all markets are centered on the exchange of service. (SDlogic.net 2015.) Service-dominant logic is leading the study in this report.

S-D logic framework for value co-creation focuses on value-in-use and in-context and suggests that service systems simultaneously access, adapt and integrate resources to create value for themselves and others. (Vargo Maglio Akaka 2008, 150-151.) The study of the service in this report is supported by co-creation concept.

The research will be carried out based on service design process and different service design tools will be utilized in each step of the process. The service design processes mainly include four steps, exploration, creation, reflection and implementation. These four stages are inter-active to each other. The first two steps - exploration and creation are mainly focused in this report. In each step, different types of service design tools can be utilized to realize the design purposes. (Stickdorn 2012, 120-212.)

In this thesis report, the field work will be arranged with customers and a member of staff from company X. Co-creation is the main concept to lead the service design. In the field works, the service design process will be gone through with the participators. Interviews will be arranged with both customers and the member of staff of company X to hear voice from them. In each step of service design process, different service design tools and methods will be utilized together with the participators. The purposes of using the service design tools are to explore the development areas and create development ideas (Stickdorn 2012, 120-212).

The feedbacks and development suggestions will be collected from customers and the member of staff of company X. The final development decisions will be made based on the feedbacks and outcomes of research work.

### 1.5 The Structure of the Thesis Report

First service-dominant logic and co-creation theories will be introduced as they are leading the study in this report. The definition and importance of cross-cultural customer service will be introduced. The importance of cross-cultural communication in the customer service and its relevant strategies will be emphasized.

The cross-cultural customer service development strategies will be briefly discussed and the customer experience will be introduced. The customer experience will give a leading direction to develop cross-cultural customer service.

The culture dimensions theories will be an important part of this thesis, because the theories will be a foundation stone for carrying out research and field work to develop customer service for the study case (Geert Hofstede 2010, 53-296). Geert Hofstede's theories about cultures and also other scholars' theories about the culture related customer service will be introduced.

Then based on the theories, the research and field work will be carried out on the study case. The current service content and quality will be analyzed based on the interviews to the students and the member of staff of company X. The feedbacks from the interview participants will be very important to draw up a service development plan for company X. A workshop will be carried out by the thesis author, the member of staff of company X and students. In the workshop, the current situation of company X's services will be discussed and analyzed, and suggestions to develop the services will be given.

In the final part of this thesis, the current customer service situation of the study case will be summarized and a service development plan will be provided. The importance of cross-cultural customer service will be emphasized. A conclusion on current cross-cultural customer service situation will be briefly made.

## 2 Service-dominant logic and Co-Creation

### 2.1 Service-dominant logic

Service-dominant logic is a leading concept in current customer service industry. Service-dominant logic is applicable in this thesis report because this report focuses on an organization which is providing typical service. Service-dominant logic is the fundamental concept to support the study in this report.

Service-Dominant (S-D) Logic is the logic for a unified understanding of the purpose and nature of organizations and markets. The foundational proposition of S-D logic is that organizations and markets are fundamentally concerned with exchange of service - the applications of competences (for instance knowledge and skills) for the benefit of an organization. That is, service is exchanged for service; all firms are service firms; all markets are centered on the exchange of service. Consequently, marketing thought and practice should be grounded in service logic, principles and theories. (SDlogic.net 2015.)

The opposite of S-D logic is goods-dominant (G-D) logic which is goods and manufacturing-based. S-D logic is in line with concepts of the value-in-use and co-creation of value rather than the value-in-exchange concept of G-D logic. Thus, instead of firms being informed to

market to customers, they are instructed to market with customers, as well as other value-creation partners in the firm's value network. (SDlogic.net 2015.)

The central principle of S-D logic is that reciprocal service, defined as the application of competences for the benefit of another party, is the fundamental basis of economic exchange. It can be understood as that, service is exchanged for service. In S-D logic, "service" is a concept defined in terms of using competences for the benefit of another party. It is an inclusive term, with goods representing a mechanism for service provision. (Gummesson et al. 2010, 9-17.) The emergence of S-D logic has emphasized the centrality of service in marketing and suggests that the theories and models are applicable to all of marketing, including the subset of instances in which goods are involved (Vargo et al. 2008, 254-259).

In Stephen L. Vargo's article - On value and value co-creation: A service systems and service logic perspective, this concept is also expounded and confirmed. The creation of value is the main purpose and central process of economic exchange. Traditional models of value creation focus on the firm's output and price. Nowadays from an alternative perspective, service-dominant logic has been a growing stream of thought. Service, the application of competences (knowledge and skills) by one party for the benefit of another, is the underlying basis of exchange. (Vargo et al. 2008, 145-152.) S-D logic considers the relationship between service and a good - that is, a good is an appliance used in service provision. The two logics - G-D and S-D - are different stages in the concept development. There is no good-versus-service winner. (Vargo et al. 2006, 281-288.)

A service-centered approach to social and economic exchange broadens the process of value creation beyond a firm's operation activities, to involve the active participation of customers and other stakeholders to create value together. The unit of analysis moves from the firm, customer, to the service ecosystems of which they are a part. Service ecosystems are relatively self-contained, self-adjusting systems of resource-integrating actors connected by shared institutional logics and mutual value creation through service exchange. (Vargo et al. 2006, 281-288.)

S-D logic can be understood as another restatement of ideas from earlier phases in the development of marketing thought, such as services marketing, relationship marketing, market orientation, network perspectives, integrated marketing communications and the resource based view of the firm. The goods dominant marketing logic somehow limits the mind-set for seeing the opportunities for co-creation of value with customers and other stakeholders. Similarly, a transactional exchange view does not pay enough attention to customer loyalty and puts constraints on developing the lifetime value of the customer to the firm. S-D logic proposes broadening the logic of exchange, both social and economic, and that will stimulate

academic and practitioner thinking about the role of marketing in the business world of tomorrow. (Vargo et al. 2006, 281-288.)

In article Service-dominant logic: reactions, reflections and refinements, Robert F. Lusch and Stephen L. Vargo give a table which shows a clear picture of conceptual transitions from goods-dominant logic concepts to service-dominant logic concepts. From the table below, it clearly shows how the concepts evolve from G-D logic to S-D logic and their definitions in between as transitional concepts (Vargo et al. 2006, 281-288). From the table, the service organizations and service designers could identify the way of understanding on the service concept evolution and focus on the areas where transit dramatically.

**Conceptual transitions**

Goods-dominant logic concepts	Transitional concepts	Service-dominant logic concepts
Goods	Services	Service
Products	Offerings	Experiences
Feature/attribute	Benefit	Solution
Value-added	Co-production	Co-creation of value
Profit maximization	Financial engineering	Financial feedback/learning
Price	Value delivery	Value proposition
Equilibrium systems	Dynamic systems	Complex adaptive systems
Supply chain	Value-chain	Value-creation network/constellation
Promotion	Integrated marketing communications	Dialogue
To market	Market to	Market with
Product orientation	Market orientation	Service orientation

Table 1, Conceptual transitions (Vargo et al. 2006, 281-288)

Service-dominant logic is leading the service study in this thesis report. S-D logic guides the study from new perspective to understand the service and perform the research. According to service-dominant logic, the study company in this report is not only delivering “goods” - language knowledge and social information to the customers, they are more taking a service provider’s role to “serve” customers to open the door and go into the Finnish society. In this service study, service-dominant logic gives way of thinking and designing from service perspective.

## 2.2 Co-creation

Co-creation is widely used in customer service industry nowadays. It is also used in service study in this report. Service provider, customer and service designer involve in the service co-

creation in this study. Co-creation supports participators to exchange ideas and create development suggestions.

Co-creation is a management initiative, or form of economic strategy, that brings different parties together (for instance, a company and a group of customers), in order to jointly produce a mutually valued outcome. In customer service industry, according to co-creation concept, markets can be seen as platforms for service organizations and customers to share, combine and renew each other's resources and capabilities to create value through new forms of interaction, service and learning mechanisms. It differs from the traditional passive consumer market of the past. (Prahalad et al. 2004, 3.)

Co-creation redefines the way that service organizations engage individuals (for instance customers, employees, suppliers, partners and other stakeholders). Co-creation brings these individuals into the process of value creation and engages them in enriched experiences, in order to establish new strategies, design new services, transform management process, lower risks and costs, increase market share, loyalty and returns. (Ramaswamy et al. 2010, 1.)

The importance of co-creation is also stressed in service-dominant logic. In service-dominant logic, the customer is always considered as a co-creator. The consumer is always involved in the creation of value. This concept works with intangible service, and even with tangible goods - production does not end with the manufacturing process; production is an intermediary process. In the conceptual transitions, co-creation concept has experienced the evolution from value-added, co-production, to co-creation (see Table 1). (Vargo et al. 2006, 281-288.)

The S-D logic notion of value co-creation emphasizes that there is no value until an offering is used - experience and perception are essential to value determination. It can be understood as that, offerings must be integrated with other market-facing (for instance other firms) and non-market-facing (for instance personal and public) resources for value to be created. (Vargo et al. 2006, 44.) In S-D logic, marketing is considered as social and economic processes, in which the concept of interaction is central. The main idea is that value creation is a process of integrating and transforming resources, which requires interaction and implies networks. Similarly, the central S-D logic concept of co-creation of value is an interactive concept. (Vargo et al. 2006, 281-288.)

In customer service industry, according to co-creation concept, the service organization's roles in value creation, the proposition of value and provision of service, are intermediary to the value co-creation process. Value propositions establish connections and relationships among service systems. In value co-creation, value is ultimately derived with the participation of, and determined by, the customer through use in the process of acquisition, usage,



and disposal. (Holbrook 1987, 128-132.) Value co-creation has wide range of resources and activities involve. It could occur through the integration of variant resources with those available from different service systems that can contribute to system well-being. Each service system accesses resources from other service systems through exchange. These systems could be internal (for instance service organization's employees), private (for instance personal connections, stockholders), and market-facing (suppliers, other economic exchanges) systems and resources. The resources of the service organization are adapted and integrated with a service system's existing resources, and value is derived. The process continues as new knowledge is generated and exchange occurs within and among surrounding systems. (Vargo et al. 2008, 149-151.)

Generally, S-D logic framework for value co-creation fundamentally shifts the underlying focus of value creation away from service organization's output. It focuses on value-in-use and in-context and suggests that service systems simultaneously access, adapt and integrate resources to create value for themselves and others. (Vargo et al. 2008, 150-151.)

The service study in this report is led by service-dominant logic and strongly supported by co-creation concept.

### 3 The Dimensions of Culture and Building Trust between Cultures

#### 3.1 The Definition of Culture

Geert Hofstede defines culture as "the collective programming of the mind that distinguishes the members of one category of people from another." The key expression in this definition is collective programming. It describes a process to which each one of us has been subjected since birth. In one sense, each cultural group gives its children a different set of instructions, each equally valid in their own environment. As people grow up, these learned national or regional concepts become their core beliefs, which is almost impossible to discard. In the meanwhile, it is hard to accept the different concepts in other nations or regions. (Hofstede 2001, 9-13.)

In general, the national or regional cultures impose themselves on people's behavior rather than the other way round. Interacting with the people who are in the same culture, generally the closer people stick to the rules of the society, the more accepted they become. (Hofstede 2001, 9-13.)

The Oxford dictionary defines culture in several conditions, in customer service industry, "The ideas, customs, and social behavior of a particular people or society" can be quoted as

the definition in the topic here (Oxford dictionary 2013). This definition first talks about a particular people or society. The particular people or society here can be considered as the customers in service industry. Nowadays a common understanding is that the customers should always be in the central place in a service; a service provider should provide service according to the different demands of the customers. Why do the customers have different demands? Their cultural backgrounds can more or less explain on this question.

As the above definition says, the particular people or society's ideas, customs and social behavior constitute the culture. These ideas, customs and social behavior are the basis of people's demands. These different ideas, customs and social behavior will give people different senses of worth. People will pursue different targets to fulfill their senses of worth. These different targets can be more or less seen as their demands. In customer service world, these demands give customers different needs from the services and the customers define the service quality in their own "languages" - cultures. The definition of a "good" service can vary quite a lot in different cultures. (Hofstede 2001, 9-13.)

### 3.2 The Dimensions of Culture

Geert H. Hofstede was born in 1928, Netherland. Hofstede is most well-known for his study on dimensions of cultural variability, also commonly known as "Hofstede's Dimensions." Hofstede's Dimensions contain: Power Distance, Individualism-Collectivism, Masculinity-Femininity, Uncertainty Avoidance, and Long-Term/Short Term Orientation. These dimensions were published in his 1980 publication "Culture's consequences: International differences in work-related values". Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory is a framework for cross-cultural communication. Hofstede developed his original model as a result of using factor analysis to examine the results of a world-wide survey of employee values by IBM in the 1960s and 1970s. The theory was one of the first that could be quantified, and could be used to explain observed differences between cultures. (Hofstede 2010, 53-296.) Hofstede's cultural dimensions theory will be a theoretic basis for the research and study in this thesis.

#### *Power Distance*

This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people. People in societies exhibiting a large degree of power distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification. In societies with low power distance, people strive to equalize the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power. (Hofstede 2010, 53-86.)

Generally power distance is higher in Asian and African countries than European and North American countries. From population perspective, generally the larger population within a culture, the greater the power distance is likely to be. From distribution of wealth perspective, the more unequally the wealth is distributed within a culture, the greater the culture's power distance is likely to be. (Hofstede 2010, 53-86.)

In customer service world, the signs of power distance can be seen. In some countries, for instance Japan and China, where the power distance is great, the customers have great demands from service providers. Providing solution is essential but not enough. Serving politely, delivering service timely, and keeping the promise are highly expected from the customers. On the contrary, in some countries, for instance Scandinavian countries, where the power distance is little, customers and service providers are on the same level stage. The customers more care the solution itself. Smiling, talking and pleasantries are not that necessary.

#### *Individualism - Collectivism*

The high side of this dimension, called individualism, can be defined as a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families. Its opposite, collectivism, represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we". (Hofstede 2010, 89-133.)

Generally individualism prevails in Western and developed countries, and collectivism is common in Eastern and less developed countries. People in collectivistic cultures are willing to be group-oriented. They set up an obvious psychological distance between in-group and out-group members. The in-group members are usually expected to have unquestioning loyalty to their group. When a conflict happens, the people of the collectivistic cultures might prefer to use avoidance, intermediaries, or other face-saving methods to "solve" the problem - although it might not be a real solution. In contrast, there is no obvious psychological distance between in-group and out-group members in the individualistic cultures. People in the individualistic cultures usually like to express themselves directly, consider speaking out as a common method to resolve problems, and sometimes use confrontational strategies to deal with interpersonal problems. (Hofstede 2010, 89-133.)

In terms of customer service, in collectivistic cultures, customers would like to be friend or partner with the service provider. They consider "care" as the tie for customer relationship in those countries. The loyalty is not a one-way treatment. The customers also expect the service provider to be loyal to them. The customers can not accept the ignorance or deviation

from the service provider. Usually the most important task for the service provider is not providing solution, but saving the customer's face - meaning care and respect. After-sales service is more important in those countries as customers consider it as a sign of loyalty. A good after-sales service will maintain a good long-term customer relationship and the service provider will gain the loyalty from the customers as well.

### *Masculinity - Femininity*

The masculinity side of this dimension represents a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success. Society at large is more competitive. Its opposite, femininity, stands for a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life. Society at large is more consensus-oriented. In the business context Masculinity versus Femininity is sometimes also related to as "tough versus gender" cultures. (Hofstede 2010, 135-184.)

This dimension can be also considered as achievement-nurturance. It describes the degree to which a culture values people's behaviors as assertiveness, achievement and acquisition of wealth or caring for others, social supports and the quality of life. According to Hofstede's theory, people in high masculinity index believe in achievement and ambition. In a masculinity culture, there are obvious distinct expectations of male and female roles in society. People in high masculinity index believe less in external achievements or assertiveness. They care more about quality of life. Feminine cultures also prefer equality between male and female and there are less distinct expectations of male and female roles in society. The more "feminine" cultures have more ambiguity in what is expected of each gender. (Hofstede 2010, 135-184.)

Nowadays with the development of the times, the division of roles between male and female is not that clear anymore. People might have some impressions about the distinct expectations of male and female roles in some countries, for instance Asian countries, but the cultures there have changed quite a lot. Those cultures should not be seen from old perspective anymore. On the other hand, there might be a common custom all over the world that customers expect more technical and practical support from male service provider, and more meticulous and patient from female service provider.

### *Uncertainty Avoidance*

The uncertainty avoidance dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity. The fundamental issue here is how a society deals with the fact that the future can never be known: should we try to control the future or just let it happen? Countries exhibiting strong uncertainty avoidance index (UAI)

maintain rigid codes of belief and behavior and are intolerant of unorthodox behavior and ideas. Weak UAI societies maintain a more relaxed attitude in which practice counts more than principles. (Hofstede 2010, 187-233.)

Uncertainty avoidance refers to the extent to which a culture feels threatened by ambiguous, uncertain situations and tries to avoid them by establishing more structure. Uncertainty-avoiding cultures like to minimize the possibility of unforeseen accident or unstructured composition. Uncertainty-avoiding cultures usually establish strict laws, rules, security measures, and philosophical commitment to the absolute truth. Uncertainty-accepting cultures are more tolerant of different opinions. Traditional and common understanding is that Germany and Japan are high in uncertainty avoidance; Scandinavian and North American countries are more uncertainty accepting. (Hofstede 2010, 187-233.)

In terms of customer service, customers in strong uncertainty avoidance culture expect the service provider to keep their promise and deliver the service as agreement or promise. These customers might forecast the possible accidents in the service and try to get promise from the service provider to avoid those accidents. The frequent changes and delay of service might break the relationship with the customers. If the unforeseen accidents cannot be avoided, the communication and reasonable explanation are very essential. From another point of view, once a service provider can fulfill the requirement of the customers in strong uncertainty avoidance culture, it is easier to establish the customer loyalty, since they trust on you and will try to avoid unnecessary risks in the future. This is an optimistic point for the service provider.

#### *Long Term Orientation - Short Term Normative Orientation*

Every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and the future. Societies prioritize these two existential goals differently. Societies who score low on this dimension, for example, prefer to maintain time-honored traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. Those with a culture which scores high, on the other hand, take a more pragmatic approach: they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future. (Hofstede 2010, 235-274.)

In customer service world, the customers in long-term orientation culture expect a persistent and stable relationship with service provider. In those customers' mind, they like to grow up together with the service provider and make efforts on it. For the service provider, to fulfill the requirements of those customers, especially at the begging of relationship establishes, is very important to establish a long-term customer relationship. Since those customers are willing to look far and accept changes, they might provide suggestions to the service provider and involve in the service development. The service provider should value the opportunity of co-

creation and exchange information and ideas with those customers. By contrast, it is better to keep the existing quality and process of the service for the customers in short-term orientation culture. The frequent changes of the service might make those customers uncertain and doubt to continue the relationship. Chinese customers can be seen as long-term orientation customers. The recent economic success there has proved that the people there are willing to make efforts for the future and accept the frequent changes. The service provider could often try new and different service concepts, methods and products to catch the potential opportunities.

### 3.3 Building Trust between Different Cultures

In the previous chapters, the variances between different cultures have been discussed, nowadays people all over the world have been making a lot of efforts to shorten the distance between the cultures and build the trust in between. The trust here are not only the trust between different cultures, but can be considered as the trust between service provider and customer who are in different cultures. In customer service area, building trust is also very important since it will build a bridge between service provider and customer, and establish a stable relationship.

#### *The Strategies of Building Trust*

To establish a smooth-running customer service based on mutual trust, it is good to start with a set of basic trust-building strategies. According to Richard Lewis's theories (Lewis 2006, 141-148), these strategies can be:

- Set common and clear goals between service provider and customer
- Provide clear instructions to customer
- Communicate effectively to each other
- Share open and transparent information in between
- Provide practical and user-friendly tools to customer
- Set up trust repair systems
- Recognize each other's contributions

These strategies should be established from beginning of building customer relationship and kept in each other's mind. The trust is an interaction between service provider and customer. Building trust is not only the service provider's responsibility, the customer also has responsibility to maintain the trust and develop the relationship. (Lewis 2006, 141-148.)

### *High-Trust and Low-Trust Societies*

People of high-trust societies normally have a ready trust for their compatriots. They are usually linear-active (a culture whose people are task-oriented, highly organized planners, preferring to do one thing at a time in the sequence shown in their diary) and assume that their fellow nationals follow the rules; in other words, trust a person until he or she proves untrustworthy. In contrary, people of low-trust cultural societies are initially suspicious of fellow nationals. They are usually multi-actives (a culture whose people tend to do many things at once, often in an unplanned order, usually people oriented, and extrovert) who have a more flexible adherence to rules, regulations and laws. (Lewis 2006, 145-146)



Illustration 2 High- and Low-Trust Countries (Lewis 2006, 145-146)

Richard Lewis's surveys have indicated the degrees of trust in different countries. Usually Nordics countries for instance Denmark and Finland score highest. Germany and Japan are close behind. Britain is on the medium level. USA, who was once in the high-trust category, has a declining trust level due to perceived corruption in state and national government and in their financial institutions, particularly in corporate governance. (Lewis 2006, 145-146.) (see Illustration 2)

Richard Lewis's surveys also indicated the Low-trust cultural groups. For instance, China, Mexico, France and the Latin and Arab countries. People in these cultures usually trust only those they know best: family and one or two close, lifetime friends. (Lewis 2006, 146.) (see Illustration 3)

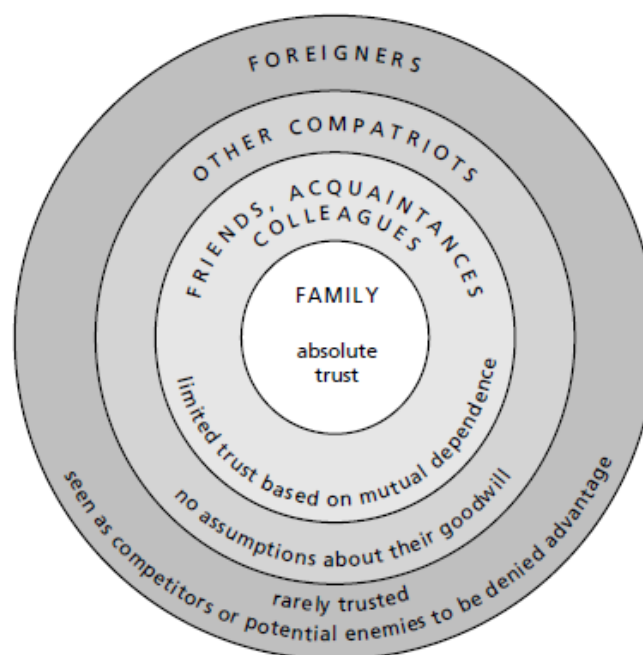


Illustration 3 Low Trust (Lewis 2006, 146)

In highly reactive cultures such as Japan, China and Korea, trust is gained through respectful behavior, protecting the other's face, reciprocating favors and exhibiting courtesies (Lewis 2006, 148). To build the trust with the customers in these countries, service provider must show sufficient respect, sincerity and courtesies. The service content itself is important, but the service provider's attitude is more important. The customers in these cultures will also be influenced by their family and close friends. Once the service provider can gain the trust from one customer, his or her recommendation will influence others and the potential customer group is very huge. It is not easy to gain the trust in these cultures, but once you gain the trust, the customer relationship could be stable. In contrast, in western cultures, compassion and closeness are not required to build the trust, but flattery and reference to shared experience or common friends are needed. (Lewis 2006, 148.)

#### 4 Multi-Cultural Customer Service

Nowadays, with the trend of global integration, more and more service organizations must face to a fact that the customers come from different countries in the world. Even if the service organization is providing service in one region, it is quite possible that the foreigners in this region will become the customers. How to meet the needs of multicultural customers has become an important topic to the service organization. The needs of multicultural customers could mean that the service organization provides service in different languages, or must have a deep understanding the varied cultural backgrounds of customers, or even deeply in-



tegrate into different cultures. It will depend on target customers and the service itself. (Business News Daily 2011.)

#### 4.1 Cross-Cultural Communication

The first fact that the service organization must face to could be how to communicate with the customers who have different cultural backgrounds.

Nowadays, understanding only customer's needs is important but not enough; you must understand their cultures as well, and communicate with them effectively. How to communicate effectively? Provide service in their languages? That is essential but not enough. You need to learn their "cultural language" - what they think and how they behave differently.

##### *The Importance of Cross-Cultural Communication*

Cross-cultural communication is quite necessary to be widely applied to customer service and other practical areas. The misunderstanding that sometimes unnoticed can be reduced by studying cross-cultural communication. The service quality can be improved by studying cross-cultural communication and customer relationship can be enhanced. The interactions between service provider and customer can be individuals-to-individuals, individuals-to-organization, or organization-to-organization. Whoever the participators are in the service, there is a fact that nowadays no one can avoid - they need to "talk" to each other. Since the service participators might come from different corners on this earth, when they are "talking" to each other, they might speak different languages; even if they can speak the same language, their different cultural backgrounds might bring some misunderstanding in between. That's why the service providers need to study and have a basic understanding of different cultures to communicate effectively. On the other hand, the customers also need to have a basic knowledge of different cultures as all the service participators have responsibilities to make the service running smoothly. (Cotton 2013, 67-129.)

##### *Examples of Cross-Cultural Communication*

In different countries, customers are treated differently. In some Asian countries customers might put themselves on the dominant position because of the traditional culture of social hierarchy degree. In the communication, the respect is the most important and there might be difference in understanding what respect is. To avoid contradiction in communication, the greeting languages can be very helpful. "Hello", "Thank you" and "Goodbye" these simple greeting words could increase service provider's goodwill. Another point needs to be noticed is that the service providers need to consider the power of promotion in the communication.

It is better to allow Asian customers to make decisions themselves, instead of promote too heavily. (Hofstede 2010, 53-86.)

In some countries the relationship between service organization and customers is like “serve and be served”, but in some other countries, customers prefer to be friend or partner with the service organization. “Care” could be a key word to maintain customer relationship in the latter countries. After-sales service is considered more important in those countries as customers want to grow together with their “friends” or “partner”. A good after-sales service will maintain a long-term customer relationship. (Hofstede 2010, 89-133.)

In some countries, customers have a common sense that there is a service standard which means there is no extra service to individuals. On the contrary, customers could be more demanding because of their dominant position, for instance in some Asian countries as discussed above. In this case, customers might expect “personal tailor” services. In communication with these customers, rejection is not a good solution which might break the customer relationship. (Hofstede 2010, 53-274.)

In some cultures, especially goal-driven cultures, customers care more about the service content itself, for instance in Scandinavian countries. They care less how the service organizations deliver the service. The most important thing is that they can receive the service that they need. By contrast, the customers who have different culture backgrounds - for example the East Asian regions - might care more how the service organizations serve them. The service attitude, politeness, honesty, punctuality and so on, these can be more important than the service content to these customers. (Hofstede 2010, 53-274.)

### *The Cross-Cultural Communication Strategies*

As mentioned above, both service participants - service organization and customers need to have the basic knowledge about cross-cultural communication. Generally this knowledge is the key to make the communication effective. It is very necessary that service organization and customers could understand the mismatch in a cross-cultural communication and make effort together to reduce the mismatch. Another thing cannot be ignored is that it is very possible that the mismatch cannot be reduced easily, all the service participants need to adjust their behavior further to meet each other. The misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication is like a wall standing between the service organization and customers. They all need to do continued effort to make the wall lower and lower. Finally they will understand each other and see the smiling faces of each other.

When misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication happens, before finding a solution, the first thing is to be patient and forgiving. Sometimes the problem might develop, it is very

important to respond slowly and carefully to each other. Listening is a good method to really understand the root cause of misunderstanding. Listening is much helpful than speaking and explaining when conflict happens in cross-cultural communication. An active listening is not only listening to what others talk, but also watching their body language. Since the misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication might be caused by different languages, body language can help people exchange messages. (University of Colorado, Conflict Research Consortium, 1998.)

#### 4.2 Multi-Cultural Customer Service Development

After having a basic understanding of cross-cultural communication, now it is time think about how to develop multi-cultural customer service.

First the service organizations should have a clear understanding on target market - from geography point of view, the target market could be easily considered as target regions; and from customer segments point of view, the target market can be considered as what kind of customer the service organizations want to serve.

After defining the target market, the service organizations need to launch a deep research on the culture of the target market. For example, they must know the language in the target market - what are the primarily and secondarily spoken in the market. In some countries, customers might have different language preferences when they are using different communication channels - for instance in some Asian countries English can be used for communication in written platform like letter and email but people might have difficulty to speak English in chat or phone conversations. (Business News Daily 2011.)

Secondly it is necessary to research on customer queries. Customer queries fall into four broad categories of varying complexity and interaction depth: informational - for instance, "What is flight schedule?"; transactional - for instance, "Can you open a bank account for me?"; advice-related - for instance, "What shoes are suitable for my training?" and diagnostic - for instance, "What is the problem with my computer system?" (Business News Daily 2011.)

The more complex the queries are, the more deeply the research must be done for multi-cultural customer service. Generally, transactional, diagnostic and advice-related queries present more service differentiation opportunities through multi-cultural customer service than informational ones. (Business News Daily 2011.)

A good method is to get help from agents in some regions as they know the culture there much better. So the third think that the service organization needs to consider is how to es-

establish relationship with agents and train them. It is also essential for the agents to keep multi-cultural customer service concept in mind. (Business News Daily 2011.)

Service policies and practices localization can be the forth thing that the service organization needs to consider. Basically a service organization has standard policies and practice rules, but they might not be acceptable in some countries. For example, in European countries, customers might accept two or three days to receive respond and solution from the service provider, but in some Asian countries customers are used to receive answer from the service provider within 48 hours. The service organization needs to localize the policies and practice rules in different regions.

The technology support can also be considered by service organization. The labor cost can be quite high in some countries. It requires the service organization to utilize the technology to develop multi-cultural customer service. It will realize automation in the standard process and reduce the cost. To realize the service automation, the service organization should research if the target customers really accept auto-service, since based on the education and age backgrounds, customers might have different attitude to auto-service. (Business News Daily 2011.)

#### 4.3 Culture Influence on Customer Service Experience

Customer experience is the sum of all experiences at various touch points a customer has with a supplier of services, over the duration of their relationship with that supplier. It includes awareness, discovery, attraction, interaction, purchase, use, cultivation and advocacy. (Thompson et al. 2014; Schmitt 2003, 17.)

Nowadays technology developments enable the service organization to communicate and provide services to the customers in almost any corner of the world. Generally the customers need quick and thorough solutions, but the more are expected. An excellent customer service experience can vary from culture to culture. A standard service might lead to diverse customer service experiences and different degrees of satisfaction. Having a deep understanding on cultural values, behaviors and attitudes regarding service expectations in various cultures is essential for the service organizations' success. (Shinomiya 2011, 2; Goodman 2014, 11-49.)

Regarding customer service experience, although customers have different expectations because of the different demands, there are some universal expectations for the service organizations (Shinomiya 2011, 3; Goodman 2014, 33-49). For instance, the customers expect that the service organizations have sufficient understanding about the service/product and the

customers, can create positive customer experience, and the service is provided timely and courteously.

Although these expectations are the same “words”, they might have different meanings in different regions. A positive customer service experience could differ from culture to culture. For instance, in some Asian countries, customers expect the service providers to serve politely and seriously. They care how the service providers serve them. In Scandinavian countries, the customers expect a straight-forward solution. Smiling, talking might not be that necessary. The most important thing is that the problem can be solved. In some American countries, the customers might expect the service providers be professional, also open and even humorous. The service providers must communicate with the customers and provide sufficient information.

There are different types of positive customer service experience. They can be defined only by the customers according to their own cultures. When problems caused by misunderstanding happen, the service organizations need to connect with the culture to solve the problems. A standard solution might not work well in all the places. (Shinomiya 2011, 2-5; Goodman 2014, 33-49.)

## 5 Service Design Processes and Methods

A fundamental feature of services is that they create value only when they are in use. Services should be co-designed with service provider and customers who could participate in the design process before the launch of a service. The customers who use the service take the important role in service design process. At the very least, services are the relationships between service providers and customers. More generally, the services are highly complicated networks of relationships between people inside and outside the service organization. That’s why their interactions effect on the service performance. (Polaine et al. 2013, 17-34.) The successful services should foster a more equal and reciprocal relationship with the customers. The service organizations should consider the customers as co-designers of the service. A service design involves research across all the stakeholders of the service, from the service organization’s managing people to the customer (end user), and from frontline staff to third-party partners. A service designer should design the service with the stakeholders, not for them. (Polaine et al. 2013, 35-46.)

Service design processes and methods will help a service designer to analyze the problems and potential opportunities of a service, generate new service ideas and concepts, develop the service ideas and concepts, and prototype the new ideas and concepts for implementation. (Stickdorn 2012, 120-212.)

The service design processes mainly include four stages, exploration, creation, reflection and implementation. These four stages are interactive to each other. It means that when a problem occurs in one stage, the service designer should go steps back and check the previous steps. Sometimes it is necessary to go back to the very beginning of the process. (Stickdorn 2012, 120-136.)

To ensure that all aspects are included in each stage of service design processes, the service designer should consider the clients' feedback, the structure and budget of the service organization, the partners' views and so on. The service designer has to make decision based on the consideration of all of these aspects. (Stickdorn 2012, 120-136.)

## 5.1 The Service Design Process

The processes of service design are interactive. The service design processes usually include four steps, exploration, creation, reflection and implementation. The service designer should keep in mind that when a problem occurs in one step, it is always necessary to go steps back and check the previous steps. Sometimes it might be needed to go back to the very beginning. One mistake might impact all other following steps. (Stickdorn 2012, 120-136.)

People are the heart of the service. People and their relationships effect on the service performance. People involve in a relationship with service providers, and their interactions are the act of co-producing the service experience. Thus, in service design, it is necessary to think in terms of designing for relationships and experiences that evolve and change over time, rather than just in terms of short moments of consumption or usage. (Polaine et al. 2013, 36-37.)

A lot of aspects will influence the decision of each step. The service designer should consider the views of clients, the organizational structure, the budget and resources, and so on. These aspects might also impact each other. The service designer must make decision based on the consideration of all of these aspects. (Stickdorn 2012, 120-136.)

### *Step One - Exploration*

The service design process starts from understanding of the organization that is providing service. The service designer should put the customer at the central place of the process, but it does not mean that the process will start from customer. It is very important for the service designer to understand the culture and goals of the organization - this is the first task in exploration. The service organization should also have an understanding of service design thinking. They should prepare well for service design process. The organization should also agree

with the service designer on co-creation as it is essential in the process. The service designer usually starts from identifying the problem of the organization's service, besides an understanding from customer's perspective, it is important to understand the problem from the organization's point of view. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

Usually people tend to look for solutions directly to fix the problem, but as a service designer, the real second task in exploration is to have a deep understanding of the real problem. This deep understanding is not only from existing customers' perspective, but also the potential customers' perspective. Besides the deep understanding of the existing problem, the service designer should also have a long-term thinking to see the potential problem in a long term. The service design offers different methods and tools to help the service designer and organization to find out the root cause first, instead of final solution. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

The third task in exploration is visualization. The visualization includes the findings visualization and intangible services underlying. The visualization will help the service designer and organization to see the intangible processes and simplify the complex problems. The related service design methods and tools give explorers the torch before they start the exploration. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

Gathering the insights is a main action in exploration. There are three levels of insights: low - what they say, middle - what we saw, high - what it means. To reach the levels, some insights-gathering methods, for instance interview, observation, user workshops can be used. (Polaine et al. 2013, 48-72.)

### *Step Two - Creation*

The step of creation includes two stages - generative stage in the process and proceeding stage of reflection (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136). They are interactive to each other.

During the concept design stage, it is better to find out as many as possible mistakes in the service process, instead of avoiding them. It will help the service designer to recognize them as early as possible and do corrections accordingly. The cost of finding out mistakes in this stage is much lower than bearing them in the launch stage. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

The sticky-notes can be widely used in this step. It will visualize the processes and relationships, and help the service designers to record the ideas. The service design thinking is repeated within each stage. By using the sticky-notes, the service designer will be able to find out solutions based on the problems findings, the service organization's processes, customers' expectations and illustration of customer journey. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

It is very important to ensure that all the main stakeholders involve in the co-creation process. The stakeholders include customers, the organization management team and employees, and even the related supporting units who might involve in the service design. A good co-creation should be performed among all stakeholders and ensure that all stakeholders interact each other. A service designer needs to coordinate well among all stakeholders. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

It should be noticed that, service design is not only about the soft factors, such as making people feel good when they are having the service. Service design has the ability to contribute to the effectiveness of a service in terms of the hard factors too - positive economic results, successful operations, or beneficial policy outcomes. In creation step, this should be considered. It is necessary to create new revenue streams or boost existing businesses for the service. (Polaine et al. 2013, 130-132.)

### *Step Three - Reflection*

In the previous steps, the basic service design ideas and concepts have been generated, in the third step - reflection - the ideas and concepts will be tested. The prototype will be built based on the visualized ideas and concepts for testing. The customers play an important role in this step. During the testing the service designer should collect feedback from customers, adjust the ideas accordingly and retest them. This process might need to be repeated several times. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

Since the services are intangible, it is difficult for customers to give feedback for an invisible thing. It brings the challenge to this stage. The interviews and questionnaires could help for feedback collection, but they are not the best methods. The service designer needs to help customers create a vision of the service ideas and concepts to make them really visual to the customers. The comic strip, storyboard, video and photo can be used to create the emotional engagement. The emotional engagement is essential but not enough; a meaningful user interaction must be generated in other ways. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

The service ideas and concepts need to be prototyped in reality or an environment which is very close to reality. There are different role-plays and stages to build the environment. The playful approach will create emotional engagement and meaningful user interaction. It will also save the cost of testing and collect quick feedback. An intangible service can be visualized in this environment. It is much easier for customers to understand the concepts and react immediately. The service design thinking can provide different types of role-plays and staging. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)



#### *Step Four - Implementation*

Based on the outcomes of previous steps, it is time to implement the service ideas and concepts. The implementation requires a series of change. All the changes need to be planned, implemented and reviewed. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

In the previous steps, the service concepts have been generated and tested. The changes should be made based on these outcomes. The service concepts here must include a clear communication and customer experience. From this step on, employees of the service organization will play a key role because their motivation and engagement will affect the implementation. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

The employees' input should be respected from very beginning of the service design process, because their input could reduce the cost of failure in the implementation process. It is essential that employees understand the service concepts and they support the service concepts because they are the people who will implement and provide the service on a daily basis. The similar as the communication with the customers, the comic-strip, story-boards, photos and videos can be used to for employees' communication as well. The employees should not only understand the service concepts and process after they are established, they can contribute to the service design as they have sufficient experience about how the process was going in the past and what could be developed. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

The service organization management should follow the progress of the change and have an overview on it. The service blueprint can be used as a design method to monitor the process. It is recommended to involve the resources as more as possible to the prototyping. These resources will generate ideas from different aspects, although there might be some frictions. (Stickdorn 2012, 122-136.)

It is necessary for service designers and service organization to prove that design provides a return on investment. Results can be measured in terms of profit made, in an improved customer experience, value created to society, or reduced drain on the environment. (Polaine et al. 2013, 152-153.)

## 5.2 The Service Design Methods

### *Co-Creation*

As introduced in previous chapter that co-creation is a leading concept in nowadays service design. In concrete service design process, the concept of co-creation can be used in each step of service design process (Stickdorn 2012, 198). Co-creation is a very important concept

in current service design. The service organization employees, service designers, management people and customers can all participate in co-creation. The co-creation could examine and innovate the service experience. (Stickdorn 2012, 198.)

Co-creation takes place throughout the whole process of service design. The co-creation is not a single tool; it can be combined with other service design tools. The co-creation is like a principle that allows all other service design methods to be adapted. As the name indicates, co-creation requires a collaboration of a group of people. There are some issues the service designers should pay attention in a collaboration session. The service designers should not fear to say the wrong thing; they can have different opinions against the superior; they should be familiar with co-creation principles. A good service designer should be able to control the right timing of asking generalized question to open a discussion and bring the focused topic back to review the service. (Stickdorn 2012, 198.)

The purpose of co-creation session is to find out the right direction and collect a series of perspectives in the service processes. The outcomes of co-creation session will help service design team develop and realize the ideas in the following stages. It also provides a good opportunity to the departments of the organization to work together and share their ideas. The participators could feel free to express the ideas and the service designer should make the process simple and open. (Stickdorn 2012, 198.)

#### *Customer Journey Map*

A customer journey map can be used in exploration step in service design process, to visualize holistic service processes (Stickdorn 2012, 158). A customer journey map provides an overview of customer's experience. Basically it is constructed based on each touch point where the customer experiences and interacts with the service. It draws a journey of customer's experience. It is a good tool to record the interactions and customer's emotions on the service journey. (Stickdorn 2012, 158.)

It is important to identify each touch point of customer's experience. These touch points can be taken from many interactions. For example, in a travel case, the touch points can be the virtual interactions between the traveler and airline website, physical trip to the airport, face to face contact with airline staff, the trip on the airplane and arrival service. (Stickdorn 2012, 158.)

During creating the customer journey map, it is important to listen to the customer and document details of their experience. Based on the sufficient information, the service designer should identify the touch points and visualize the interactions and emotions of each touch point. (Stickdorn 2012, 158.)

The service designer should think about from where to start to draw the customer journey map. For example, the customer journey map can be drawn from the middle of the story, where the service is happening. After identifying all the touch points and locating the middle touch point, other touch points can be connected together as a flow of the story. The overview is not only telling the story, but also showing the insights of the journey. (Stickdorn 2012, 158.)

The customer journey map can describe the experience of customer and highlight the factors that affect the customer's feeling. The customer journey map is customer-focused. The customer journey map can be constructed from customer's perspective. Based on the overview on the customer journey map, the service designer can identify the touch point where the problems happen or opportunities exist. Then the service designer can analyze further. Since the customer journey map visualizes the experience of customer, it allows the comparison between different customers' experience and different service designs. Based on the differences, the service designer has possibility to see the advantages and disadvantages between his/her own service design and the competitors. (Stickdorn 2012, 158.)

Customer journey map describes the customer experience which is the sum of the task experiences involved in using a service. If customers are constantly frustrated when trying to complete goals and tasks, then they may leave and go elsewhere, and it only takes one or two poorly considered touch points for this to happen. (Polaine et al. 2013, 133-134.)

### *Interview*

Interview can be used in exploration step in service design process, to gain in-depth understanding of stakeholders (Stickdorn 2012, 162). The customers could be interviewed in order to understand what they behaved in the service and how they felt about the service. The interviews could take place close to where the customers are having the service or in another place where customers could recall the experience. (Moritz 2005, 193; Stickdorn 2012, 162.)

The aim of doing interview is to find out how customers behave and what expectations they have. Audio, video and notes can be used for interview recording. The staff and other relevant stakeholders can be interviewed as well. The questions and observations should be used to generate the insights. (Moritz 2005, 193; Stickdorn 2012, 162.)

There is a recruiting process before the interview. The interviewer could select the target interviewees. It is very important that the interviewer should provide a comfortable environment to interviewees to make them feel free to share ideas. (Moritz 2005, 193; Stickdorn 2012, 162.)

In a comfortable environment, the interviewees could easily give the true information that the interviewer looks for. It is also easy for interviewer to observe the behavior of interviewers in such good environment. By doing interview, the service designer could collect qualitative data about how customers experienced the service. The interview could give good insights into customers' behavior, the environment and the interactions between the customers and the service. (Moritz 2005, 193; Stickdorn 2012, 162.)

Interview is an efficient way to engage with people in their own context and allow them to explain how they see services. This means using different methods to make interviews as engaging, informal, and as interactive as possible through drawing and other creative activities. An engaging interview is the key to gather sufficient insights. (Polaine et al. 2013, 50-53.)

### *Personas*

Personas can be used in exploration step in service design process, to visualize customer groups as recognizable (Stickdorn 2012, 178). Personas are like the profiles of the customers who are having the service. Personas describe the characters of the customers. The characters can be very detailed. For example, the personality, quotes, expectations, family, friendship and other relationships, hobbies, wishes and so on. All of the detailed information could help service designer identify the needs of customer. (Moritz 2005, 220; Stickdorn 2012, 178.)

Normally the service designer should do research on the service users and collect the "characters" from them. The most important thing is to find out the characters which can be utilized into service design development. The service designer could create personas by using combination of other service design methods, for example stakeholder map, interview and so on. (Moritz 2005, 220; Stickdorn 2012, 178.)

By using personas, the service designer could find out the different perspectives on a service and furthermore the service designer could identify the target customer in the market. Personas could give a right direction to the service designer to discover the real expectations of the customers. Personas describe the detailed profiles of customers. It allows the service designer to discover the potential opportunities from the detailed profiles. It makes all the possible customers really visual. (Moritz 2005, 220; Stickdorn 2012, 178.)

Constructing personas is not an independent work, but a group activity. A group of participants who understand customers from different perspectives could work together. The service provider and customers could also participate in creating personas. All findings could be useful to discover the potential opportunities. (Moritz 2005, 220; Stickdorn 2012, 178.)

### *Brainstorming*

Brainstorming can be used to develop a large number of ideas with a group of people. It is a workshop or meeting in which all the participants could have wild ideas and there should not be limit or criticism. The target is to generate a large number of ideas. All the ideas need to be written down on the note or paper. (Moritz 2005, 210.)

Usually brainstorm is targeted towards one issue. The service designer could invite service providers and customers to the brainstorm. If it is possible, it would be good to have everyone's ideas build on each other. (Moritz 2005, 210.)

The service designer should facilitate the brainstorm to ensure that the rules are followed, all the ideas are recorded, and the time is under control. The service designer could establish an active and inspiring environment for the participants. The brainstorm is a fast and effective method to generate a large number of ideas. (Moritz 2005, 210.)

### *Idea Generation*

Idea generation can be used in creation and reflection steps in service design process (Stickdorn 2012, 180). Idea generation can be used to structure and inspire brainstorming session. Idea generation is a simple tool to make the initial ideas visual. The format could be text or sketch. The ideas can be any type, for example the new service solutions, the improvement proposals in the interactions or individual touch points. The idea generation can simply show how the ideas look like and the notes can be used to explain the problem and solutions. (Stickdorn 2012, 180.)

The idea generation can be created based on a customer journey map. The service designer could review the customer journey map and generate ideas for the touch points where the solutions or improvements needed. The service designer could share the idea with customers or service provider for discussion. In the discussion, the participants could use notes to record and express their ideas. The initial ideas can be developed and new ideas can be generated in the discussion. The discussion participants might have the similar ideas. They can generate ideas independently first. After all the ideas are generated, they can be displayed all together. The discussion participants can review the ideas, sort them, and highlight the most valuable ones. (Stickdorn 2012, 180.)

The service designer could use idea generation for customer journey analysis for an existing service, existing encounters improvements, or new ideas generating. Using visual materials and creating an active work dynamic is important. (Stickdorn 2012, 180.)

There is no limit to generate ideas, but it is necessary to notice that a service idea also needs to have a business idea behind it - the service proposition. Without this, even the best ideas will not be economically feasible. Key to the service proposition is being able to answer three questions:

- Do people understand what the service could do for them?
- Do people see the value of it in their life?
- Do people understand how to use it? (Polaine et al. 2013, 128.)

## 6 Service Design Process Carried out

As mentioned in the beginning, the aims of this thesis are to analyze the current situation of the integration training service, talk about how the cultural elements effect on the service quality, find out the potential development opportunities and provide development suggestions. To achieve these goals, a series of field work were carried out:

- Interview customers - Finnish language course students
- Collect feedback and development suggestions from the customers
- Interview service provider - a member of staff from company X
- Carry out workshop with the member of staff from company X
- Collect feedback and development suggestions with the member of staff of company X and customer

The first two steps of service design process - exploration and creation were mainly focused. In service design process, according to the service design methods theory (Stickdorn 2012, 146-212), there are different service design methods and tools for each step. Some service design methods and tools were utilized in each step.

In exploration step, following tools were used: customer journey map, interview - customer interview and service provider interview, personas - do customer personas with service provider. In creation step, brainstorming and idea generation were used to co-create ideas with customer and service provider. See illustration 4, Service Design Process and Related Methods.

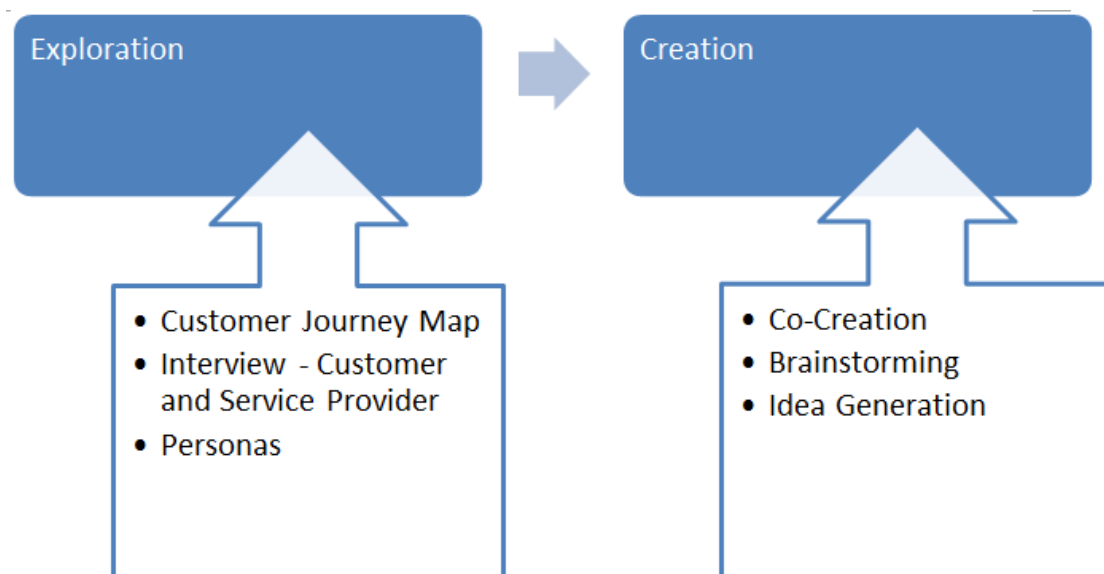


Illustration 4 Service Design Process and Related Methods

## 6.1 Exploration

### 6.1.1 Listen to Customers

#### *Establish the Objectives*

Before the interview, a series of preparation works were done. The first step was to establish the objectives of the interview. Besides the official guidance that employment office provided to the immigrants, it was important to hear how the interviewees describe the whole process - from application to graduation. It would be helpful to know what they did every day when they had the training - what they did in the classroom and what they did after training time. Another important thing was that how they successfully found a job with the help of this service. In the end it would be important to know if they have any ideas about where and how the service can be developed.

#### *Find Interviewees*

The target customers were the students who had Finnish integration training service in Finland. Based on my personal connection in Finland, several Chinese customers were selected to the interview. Basically they had the integration training service when they just arrived in Finland. The selected interviewees have had the training service for several years and some of them have found good jobs after graduation. They could know well how the processes go and how much the service can help them. Six interviewees were invited. They were to be in-

interviewed to know their feeling about the service and collect suggestions to develop the service. They were going to give feedback mainly from Asian customer's point of view, but they would also share the ideas that they have heard from the other countries' customers. These suggestions could develop the service and help more immigrants live well in Finland.

Basically most of the interviewees had some typical stories. A family arrived in Finland because one in the family received a job offer in Finland. When he or she was working in Finland, his or her spouse started to have integration training service. After obtaining a basic language skill, the spouse started to have further education or look for job in Finland. Many of my interviewees have been able to work in Finland after having the integration training.

### *Customer Interview Preparation*

Then the questions for the interview were prepared. The whole process from application to graduation was going to be gone through. Application process should be reviewed because there were many applicants applying for the training and it was not easy to start the training immediately. Some applicants had to wait about six months to start the training. There must be something can be developed in application process.

Before doing a research about a service, it is essential to investigate it and understand where the development can be made. Preparation is so important that it will lead you to find potential development opportunities and focus on them during the research. Based on the personal experience and the feedbacks from other customer, the whole process of the Finnish integration training service was gone through by doing a customer journey map and investigated the areas where the development can happen. These development areas were to be emphasized with the interviewees in the interview.

According to the guidance of customer journey map (Stickdorn 2012, 158), the whole process of Finnish integration training service was reviewed and the most important touch points of the customers were identified. The interactions and customer's emotions of each touch point were visualized on the customer journey map based on the personal experience and feedbacks from the customers before. The customer journey map started from very beginning of the customer's journey - their arrival at Finland and their need of integration service. The main touch points were from service application, to having service, to practicing Finnish language in a part-time job, to Finnish language skill assessment and graduation. The customers showed bad emotions at several touch points, for instance, when they waited to start having the service, when the service was disturbed by other customers' behavior, when they could not have suitable training service, or when the service quality was impacted by cultural differences. These touch points could be developed and these development areas were to be emphasized with the interviewees in the interview. There were several touch points where



the customers showed good emotions, for instance, when they were having the training service, when their Finnish language skills were improved, especially when they found jobs after graduation. The illustration below shows what have been drawn on the customer journey map.

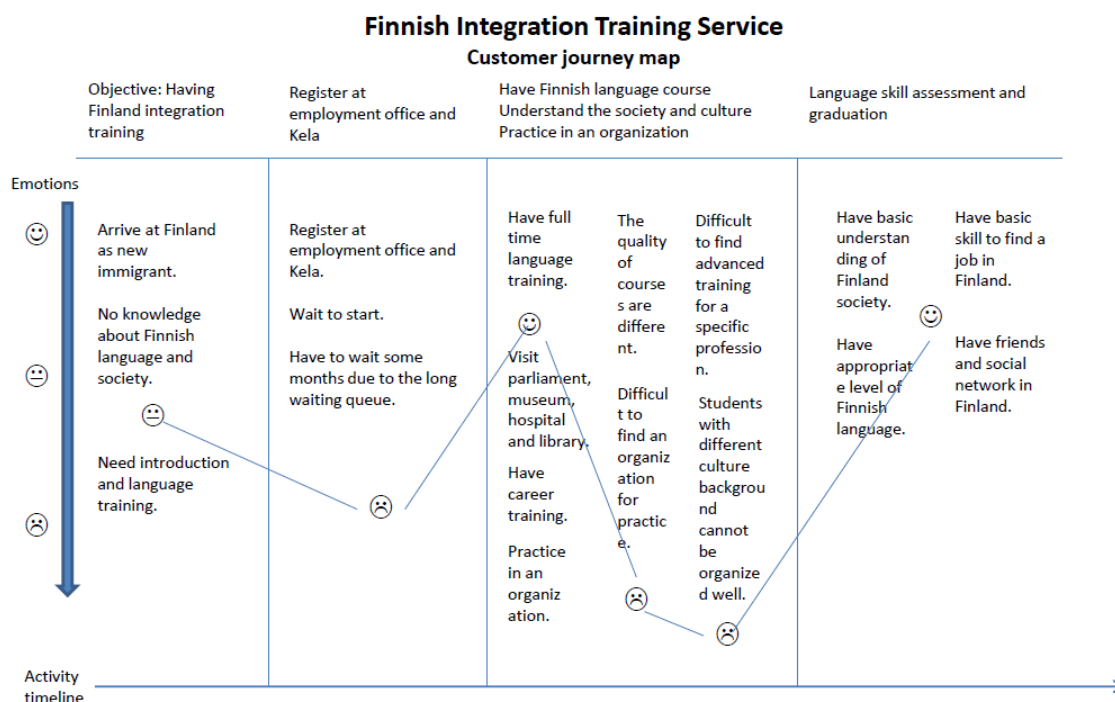


Illustration 5 Finnish Integration Training Service Customer Journey Map

The questions about interviewees' life in the classroom, outside classroom - exercise activities, and at home were prepared. Through this service, their language skill improvement could help them in every corner of their life. That's why it would be interesting to see how and where the changes happened in their life. Another important point was that it could be interesting to know how they found a job after having the training service, because for most of immigrants finding a job was the main goal of having the training.

#### *Customer Interview Method*

Note was going to be used to record the feedbacks for the interview, because it could be a good tool for a casual talk. Video was not a good method in this case, because the interviewees might feel uncomfortable before the camera, then it could be difficult to get true and deep feedback from them.

As planned, the interview would be in a casual way like the free talk between friends, it was easier for interviewees, but the interviewer need to prepare everything carefully. All the

questions must be remembered and the answers must be recorded efficiently. It is also important to keep in mind that if the conversation goes far from the core topic, it would be necessary to bring the topic back on the right track.

Regarding the record method, using note as a record method was like the two sides of a coin. The good side was that it could make the interviewees feel more casual. The video or audio might make the interviewees nervous, that's why the interview was not recorded by video or audio. On the other side, it was difficult to follow the conversation when interviewer was making the note. It could be quite difficult to concentrate on two things - talking and making note. During the interview, concentrating on the conversation was the priority. By doing that, some interviewees' answers were missing on the notes - this should be noticed and improved.

This customer interview experience pointed out an error in the record method, that's why audio was going to be used in the service provider interview. By using audio, it allowed interviewer to review the interview conveniently and catch all the details. The service provider interview and audio record method will be described in later chapter.

#### *Schedule Customer Interview*

The interviewees were interviewed one by one. The individual interview could give more time and space for the interviewees to think and talk. Phone calls were made to each of the interviewees to schedule the interview. The word "interview" was not mentioned at the beginning of the call. The purpose was not to give the interviewees a feeling that they were like research tools in the study, instead they were guests. The interviews were carried out in my home or their places. From very beginning a casual environment was created as planned.

On the other hand, the casual environment brought some difficulties for the interviewer because the preparation work must be done very well. The interviewer must keep all questions in mind and lead to the discussion to avoid going too far. More details about interview will be introduced in following chapters.

#### *Carry out Customer Interview*

The individual interview started with the interviewees separately. The interview time was agreed with each of them. The time of the interview was not limited. It was very good that in a casual atmosphere without time limit, the interviewees could talk as much as they wanted. This was different and better than a formal interview with a limited time schedule. As expected, the interviewees talked a lot about their experience and feeling about the integration training service.

At the beginning of the interview, the integration training service topic was not directly brought into the conversation. The conversation started with some easy topics. The interview just started like an easy talk between friends. Little by little, the integration training service topic was brought into the conversation.

First the application process of the integration training service was discussed. As heard, due to the large number of new immigration, some applicants had to wait a long time to start the training. Some of them even waited six months to start the training after application. The feeling and expectation of my interviewees about waiting period were asked.

Then the content of the integration training service was discussed. The first question was that how helpful the integration training service was for them. There was a same feedback from each interviewee that when they just arrived in Finland, Finnish language was extremely hard for them to learn, but after a few months training, when they obtained the basic language skill and improved little by little, the training service was really helpful to them! The better their Finnish language skill was, the more interest in learning the language they had. After gained the Finnish language skill, almost every one of the interviewees found job in Finland. From their cases, this integration training service was really helpful to them. They also pointed out some areas where the service quality can be improved and they tried to give some suggestions and solutions.

The culture was also an important topic in the interview. The students came from different countries and had different cultural backgrounds. From students' perspective, they have experienced the cultural differences between their own culture and other cultures. Sometimes the cultural differences caused some obsessions or misunderstanding when they were having the training service. There was a consensus that the culture element was a key to develop the service quality.

Since the students had different cultural backgrounds, their behaviors were led by their cultures. Sometimes there could be cultural conflictions. The cultural conflictions could cause behavior conflictions. A common behavior in a culture could be misunderstood in another culture. Some students' behavior could impact other students. It could be considered as customer's effect. In a service, the customer's behavior conflictions could impact the service quality.

Then the interviewee's experience about the practice work in the training service was discussed. The aim of practice work in the training service was help students practice their Finnish language in a working environment. Company X could help the students contact their interested companies, organizations or social institutions to have short term jobs. Since compa-

ny X and student's power were limited, some students could not find suitable places to have practice work. It was important to listen to the interviewee's expectations about practice work part in the service.

Every student had different working background and experience; they also had different expectations about their jobs after graduate from integration training. That's why the interview moved to the next topic, the students' needs of specific courses for different professions. The interviewees had different career background, for instance they worked as dentist, consultant, accountant, or trader before they came to Finland. They wanted to do the similar jobs in Finland after graduate from integration training. They expressed their needs of the specific Finnish language training in their professions.

There were also some different expectations and suggestions from each of the interviewees. For instance, they had different family situations. Some of them need time to take care of children during the day time. It could be difficult for them to attend the full day training on time. The time could be a challenge for them to have integration training.

During the interview, the answers of the interviewees were recorded on notes. Sometimes the conversation went quickly and there was no enough time to record all the details on the notes. This record method could be improved. That's why audio was used to record the interview with service provider- company X's employee.

After going through all the questions, the interview was not ended right away. Although sufficient answers have been collected, the interviewees could still bring more ideas. The discussion continued about more topics in the integration training service. The valuable feedbacks and ideas came from casual talk as well.

### *Feedback and Suggestions from Customer Interview*

#### **1) Waiting Period**

As customers said, usually the waiting period could be from two months to over a year, depending on the situation of applicant. Regarding waiting period, there could be a need that the application process could be developed to be more efficient and there might be some solutions to shorten the waiting period. According to the feedbacks from the interviewees, it should be noticed that the waiting time more or less depended on applicant's family situation. For example, if the total income was very low in applicant's family, the applicant could be able to start the training immediately, because he or she needed this service to improve the language skill, receive unemployment benefit, and then find a job to support his or her family.

The waiting period will depend on the situation of the applicant's family; in that case the current application process is reasonable. It makes sense to arrange training service first for the people who need help urgently. Then the applicant will be able to gain the language skill soon, receive unemployment benefit to support the family. For the applicant whose family situation is better or working experience and education background is better, during the waiting period, he or she might be able to find a job. When the resources are limited, it is reasonable to offer the service to the people who need it more urgently. But a clear instruction should be provided by employment office to tell the applicants the exact waiting time.

## 2) Cultural Influence

Sometimes the new immigrants with different culture backgrounds might have different understanding and reflections on the application process. For instance, the immigrants from Asia usually accepted the long waiting period. They might not push employment office and consider the long waiting period as normal process. In contrast, the immigrants from North America and Europe usually expressed their expectations directly. They might call the employment office and ask why. Since the integration service is for the immigrants from different countries all over the world, according to the feedback from the interviewees, it is indeed necessary for employment office to give a standard instruction and explain clearly why the applicants have different waiting period. It is not enough that only employment office employees understand the rule internally and it is not efficient to explain the rule case by case. The employment office should consider the different reflections from different cultures to reduce the misunderstanding since they are facing to the variant cultures.

## 3) Service Content and Methods

Regarding the integration training content and teaching methods, the interviewees pointed out some areas where the development was expected. They gave some good suggestions.

For example, some teachers did not give detailed guidance to students. They gave a large open space for students to study by themselves, but the students did not really know where they should start from. It brought much confusion to the students, especially to the beginners who just started to learn Finnish language. The beginners really need a guide on their learning journey and the teachers should act this role and give sufficient support to the students.

When a teacher gives too much self-study time to the students, the students might have no direction what they should study and what they need to improve. The students come from different countries and have different studying cultures. Some students from developed coun-

tries have better education background and self-study skills. Without clear guidance from the teacher, they might try to study by themselves, but during the self-study they might make wrong understandings and conclusions, for instance on some grammars, and study further with the wrong understanding. The students from less developed countries with little education might have no idea how to carry out self-study. Some of them might just waste the time and have nothing to study.

From the teacher's side, he or she might have received some feedbacks before from some students that they wanted more free space to have self-study, that's why he or she allowed the students to study by themselves, but the teacher must consider that the courses are for all the students from different countries. They have different studying cultures, different education backgrounds, and different reflections to self-study. The students indeed need some free spaces to digest the knowledge, but the teacher should consider the cultural variances, control the free space, give the students a clear direction and offer sufficient guidance.

Some of the interviewees pointed out that some teachers' teaching methods were very outdated because they have been using those methods for many years and they were not willing to make changes. This situation usually happened on the teachers who have been working on a same stage for many years. Nowadays there are a lot of new technologies which can make the training courses interesting and effective. If the teachers refuse to accept the new methods, they might not be able to follow the steps of the era and it is hard to make the courses attractive to the students.

One case could be a good example from where it is clear to see how a new teaching method attracted students effectively. One of the interviewees said that his teacher taught them a Finnish song in the class. The lyrics included the new grammars and words that the teacher planned to teach in that course. The melody of the song was beautiful and simple. It was not difficult for the students to remember the lyrics and sing the song. The students learned those new grammars and new words very quickly by singing the song. This was really an effective teaching method. It attracted the students firmly and made the students comfortable to study. The study will not be a boring task for students when teachers change the teaching methods.

New teaching methods will make the study easy and efficient. Actually the teachers could also be the service designers. Sometimes they could spend more time on how to teach than what to teach. The teaching methods can be developed according to requirements from the students who have different culture backgrounds. For instance, for the students who come from developed countries, the teacher could allow them to have more space for self-study. They could also be given some rigorous guidance about grammar because they usually have

desire and ambition to master the language. For the students who come from less developed country and with limited education, they can be taught in a flexible way because it will attract them quickly and allow them to easily understand what the teachers want to express. The teachers could teach them by for example singing a song, playing some games, or having situational dialogues - all the methods that they can easily accept and really learn something through them.

#### 4) Customer Behavior in the Service

Regarding the behavior of other students, according to the interviewees, there was a common phenomenon that the absence happened often in the class. Some students were absent without noticing the teacher and some of them were absent for a long period. It impacted the class management and training quality. The most important thing was that it was harm to the waiting applicants who wanted to start the training. Many applicants were looking forward to the seats in the class, but the absent students were occupying the seats and having no show. This was unfair to the waiting applicants. My interviewees have provided some feasible proposals to enhance the management system of the service. For example, if the student is absent without noticing the school over three times in a month, he or she will be warned that his or her seat will be offered to the next applicant who is waiting to start. This rule should be written in the guidance and told to students before they start the training. The interviewees suggested to link allowance together with student's performance or examination result. Since the students could receive the allowance from Kela, some of them found that even if they were absent the class, they still could receive the allowance. That's why some students were always absent. Consequently after graduate from integration training, they still did not understand Finnish language and could not contribute to the society because they could not find job with their language skill. If the allowance could be distributed depending on the student's performance, it could be an encouragement or restraint to the students. For instance, there could be a rule that the allowance will be reduced or not distributed to the student, if he or she has been absent for over three times in a month. It will improve the training quality in the class and it is fair to other students who are following the rule.

#### 5) Besides Language Course

Regarding the practice work, since some of the interviewees had difficulties to find companies or organizations to have part time job, they did not have enough chance to practice their Finnish language. They suggested that the employment office and company X could support the students by searching for the appropriate places or giving recommendation. According to the integration training process, the students should start practice work after basic language training. They need to work in some companies or organizations to for a few months to prac-

tice their language. This process is good, but most of new immigrants do not know anything about Finland society and they do not have any relationship there. It is quite difficult for them to find a place to do the practice work by themselves. The employment office and company X could help them to contact some companies or organizations, provide recommendation letters or introduce the students to the employers.

Regarding the specific language training for professions, according to the feedback from the interviewees, through the basic level training, they did not obtain sufficient language skill to continue their professions in Finland. They suggested some advanced level training for the people who have been experts in specific areas. In the advance level training, they could be taught more specific Finnish language in their professional areas and given more industry related information. It is not necessary to have one-on-one training. A group of students who have similar professions can be grouped into one class. For instance, an economic training can be organized for the students who want to work in accounting, banking or trade areas. After graduate from advanced training, these experts will have opportunities to find the positions that match their advantages and they could contribute more value to Finnish society. It will be a win-win for the immigrants and Finnish society.

#### 6.1.2 Service Provider's Voice

After collecting feedbacks from the customers, it is also very important to hear the voice from the service provider - company X. That's why a member of staff from company X was invited to join the service design.

There were several purposes to invite the member of staff from company X to join the service design:

- 1) Listen to the service provider. Understand how they see the service process and quality.
- 2) Build a bridge between customers and service provider. Let the service provider know the feedbacks from the customers.
- 3) Deliver the customer suggestions to the service provider. Understand the feasibility from company X's point of view.
- 4) Review the service process together with service provider, find out the possible development areas, develop the service process, and review the development.

An executive assistant from company X was invited, because she had experience of supporting teachers on daily classes and also handling school operation affairs. She came from China and had direct personal experience about cultural matters. Based on her experience, she could



understand how the services were delivered to customers and the whole process of the service - from application to graduation.

#### *Service Provider Interview*

The exploration started with an interview with the executive assistant of company X. The interview questions have been prepared before the interview.

The first topic was the attitude of company X towards students' feedbacks. How company X deal with the suggestions or different opinions from the students were discussed in the interview. From the customer's point of view, the attitude and reaction of the service provider towards their feedbacks were very important. It reflected the service provider's attitude to the customer and different opinions. The methods that company X collects feedbacks from the students and the frequency they collected feedbacks were also talked about.

Then the students' behavior and related affect were discussed. The behaviors were basically influenced by the cultural backgrounds of the students. Company X's students came from different countries and had different cultural backgrounds. Company X's difficulty to face to the different cultures and how they deal with the difficulties were discussed. The interviewee's suggestions that company X could adjust teaching methods to reduce the impact of cultural differences were asked.

Another topic was the cooperation within company X and with external partners. This topic was chosen because the cooperation quality impacts the service process and service quality. The internal cooperation included the information and idea sharing among teachers and different departments. The external cooperation included the cooperation with TE Toimisto (employment office), Testi Piste (testing center) and other relevant partners. The development suggestions were collected from the interviewee, and discussion was carried out to see if the cooperation and process could be developed and how the development could be realized.

To ensure a service running smoothly, the customer's behavior was also important. The customer's proper cooperation was always needed to realize the service design. That's why the next topic was about the company X's expectation from the customers. Since the students came from different countries, their customs, behaviors, thoughts could be totally different. Their understanding on a service could be also totally different. Company X always needs the customers' understanding and cooperation to deliver the service well. The customers were not only playing service receiver's role, they were building the service together with company X.

Then the general development suggestions from my interviewee were discussed. The interviewee shared a lot of development suggestions that came from her and other teachers. Compare with customer's suggestions, the member of staff of company X had deeper understanding on the service process and knew exactly where and how the development ideas could be realized. Their ideas were more feasible and those ideas could serve the customers effectively and at the meanwhile ensure company X's growth.

After the interview, the service design process and service design tools were introduced to the executive assistant of company X. In exploration step, personas were decided to use to identify the customer backgrounds, different needs; and customer journey map could be used to explore interactions and customer's emotions on the service journey.

#### *Feedbacks from Service Provider Interview*

According to the feedback from the executive assistant, company X has been doing a lot of efforts to improve their service to meet the requirements of customers. These activities could be enhanced.

Company X has collected feedbacks from students regularly. The feedbacks were collected by regular face-to-face communication and questionnaires. During each study period, a student could have individual talk with the teacher regularly. In the individual talk, the student's study progress was gone through together with the teacher, the difficulties and expectations were shared with the teacher. Based on the individual talk, the teacher did study plan for each student. The students could have different study plans according to their study progress. In addition, if the teacher did not have enough power to support a student, the student had opportunity to talk with the president of company X to get more support. After each study period, company X collected feedbacks from the students through questionnaires. According to the feedbacks of questionnaires, company X adjusted the course - update teaching materials and facilities, adjust the time table, change the teacher or have other adjustments - depending on the feedbacks from the students.

Company X has also considered the cultural matters in the service. Currently several multi-languages staffs are working in company X to support the teachers and the students communicate effectively. For the students who just came to Finland and did not speak any Finnish or English, the multi-languages staffs were taking the translator role for individual study progress talk between the student and the teacher. When the students had issues in languages or multi-cultures at company X, the multi-languages staffs were coordinators for them.

The teachers in company X had monthly meetings to have review and make plan for their work regularly. They divided into several groups on different programs - update teaching materials, adjust service process, improve teaching methods and facilities, produce teaching tools and so on. They also had information sharing meetings to share their experience and exchange ideas.

Company X provided exchange program to teachers. The teachers had opportunity to go abroad to get to know how the similar services run in other countries. Company X also invited education experts from abroad to Finland to give training to the staffs of company X.

To improve the service quality, company X expected stronger support from partners. TE Toimisto and Testi Piste were the main partners with company X. TE Toimisto was responsible for collecting and maintaining the information of the students and made integration plan for them. Testi piste was responsible for measuring the language skill of the students before they started the integration training at company X. Company X expected these two partners to provide accurate information of the students and update their information regularly when the information changed. The missing or wrong information have caused misunderstanding between company X and the students. Company X was the main contact for the students, but company X received information from TE Toimisto and Testi Piste, that's why company X has done much explanation and remedy works which should be done by the partners. The stronger support and better communication were expected from the partners.

To ensure the classes go smoothly, company X also expected support from customers. Since one student's behavior could influence others, company X provided the policy to the students before they started the integration training. Company X expected the students to attend the class on time every day, finish the homework, communicate with teachers and classmates, utilize the sources effectively at company X, and be brave and confident to speak Finnish in daily life. These supports from the students could make the training progress smoothly which would benefit all the students.

To meet the needs from more customers, the member of staff of company X had suggestions to open variant courses in the future. For instance, to help more immigrants solve the cultural matters and integrate to Finnish society, there could be a training program for the next generation of immigration. Since current immigrants could have kids in Finland, this program could help the kids or teenagers understand Finnish society and integrate at young age. This program could benefit both young immigrants and Finnish society. Company X could also cooperate with companies to open trainings for their employees. There were more and more international employees in Finland nowadays, the trainings could help these foreign employ-

ees learn Finnish language and develop their career in Finland which could also benefit Finland. The trainings for different professions could also be opened to improve employees' professional skills.

In the interview, the member of staff of company X shared a lot of good ideas to develop the service. She also expected the support from the partners and customers. These ideas and expectations were analyzed further in the following steps of service design process.

### *Personas*

First several personas were created for totally different cases in company X. The persona was an essential tool in company X's service, because the students had totally different backgrounds and cultures. Because of the cultural differences, they had different needs. The personas could be totally different for each student. From those personas we could identify the different needs of the customers and see if the current services have fulfilled their needs.

Four very typical personas were created. These personas were created according to the experience of the executive assistant of company X. These personas covered majority backgrounds of the students in company X. The personas below could generally describe the students' situations and expectations in company X.

A). Persona A describes a typical story of the people who came from Asian, and have had sufficient education and a few years' working experience, usually their expectations were to learn Finnish and find an appropriate job in Finland - Wang was a Chinese girl, 28 years old. She has married in China and had about four years working experience as an accountant. She had sufficient education in China and spoke English well. She came to Finland with her husband. She was having integration training in company X (hitaasti etenevä kotoutus koulutus) and expecting to speak Finnish fluently and then find an accountant job in Finland. (See illustration 6, Persona A in Appendices)

B). Persona B describes a typical story of the people who came from Africa (for instance Somali), and did not have sufficient education or working experience, their expectations were to learn basic Finnish and get stable income for the family - Mohammed was from Somali and 38 years old. He did not have much education and working experience before. He came to Finland as a refugee and spoke only his native language. There were six kids in his family and they were living with relief. He was having integration training in company X (luku - ja kirjoitustaidon koulutus). His expectation was to find a taxi or bus driver job in Finland and have stable income to support his family. (See illustration 7, Persona B in Appendices)

C). Persona C describes a typical story of the people who came from Finland neighbor countries, and have had basic education, usually their expectation was to develop their career or education in Finland - Tatiana was a Russian girl and 26 years old. She just graduated in Russia and came to Finland with her husband. She had a master degree in Russia but no working experience yet. She was having integration training in company X (perus - linja kotoutumis koulutus). She expected to have her first working contract in Finland or have a further education in Finland. (See illustration 8, Persona C in Appendices)

D). Persona D describes a typical story of the people who came from developed countries, and have had good education and working experience, some of them have been living in Finland for long time and had basic knowledge about Finnish language, usually their expectations were to speak Finnish well, and have a good job or develop their own business in Finland - Andrei was from Romania and 50 years old. He had over 25 years working experience as an IT expert. He has been living in Finland over 10 years and had some basic knowledge about Finnish language. He was laid off by Nokia 2 years ago. He was having integration training in company X (nopea - linja) and expecting to have a systematic training to improve his Finnish language skill. His plan was to run his own business in IT solution area in Finland. Finnish language was an essential skill for him to have his business in Finland. (See illustration 9, Persona D in Appendices)

## 6.2 Creation

### 6.2.1 Create Ideas with Service Provider

In step of creation, idea generation was the first service design tool to be used. First the feedbacks and suggestions from the customers were shared with the executive assistant of company X. The purposes were to build a bridge between the customers and service provider to let the service provider hear customers voice, and create the opportunity for co-creation.

Stickers were used to record the development ideas. The development ideas generated together with the member of staff from company X and put on a big paper. The ideas were generated from two angles - customer's angle and service provider's angle. From customer's angle, the ideas were about to develop services to meet customer's needs; from service provider's angle, the ideas were about develop company X and at the meanwhile provider better services to the customers.

The basic rule was that once an idea flashed in the mind, it can be written on the stickers, no matter it is perfect or not. Any imperfect idea could inspire service designers to get better

ideas. (Stickdorn 2012, 180) There was no limit to generate ideas and all the possible solutions could be written down.

After a brainstorm, all the possible development ideas were collected on the big paper, and then to be categorized into several categories. Based on the exploration in the first step of service design process, there were several areas where could be developed. These areas were:

- 1) Service process - develop the process, could be any step from application, to study, assessment, and graduation.
- 2) The teaching methods - develop teacher's teaching methods, use different teaching methods to meet the needs of the students who have different culture backgrounds, find out solutions to deal with the behaviors of different cultures.
- 3) Content of the training - advanced level training for the students who expect more or different, support students to find practice work opportunity.
- 4) General development suggestions - regular culture related training for teachers, develop cooperation with partners, collect feedbacks from the students regularly and etc.

After categorized the ideas, in each category, the similar ideas were going to be combined as one and the most feasible ideas which could bring benefit to both sides - customers and company X were going to be filtered out. These ideas could be focused, discussed further, and probably tested in reality.

#### 6.2.2 Co-Create Development Ideas

As introduced in previous chapter, co-creation is concept that let customer and service provider involve in the service design process. It is a good method to hear the invoice from customer and service provider at the same time. It builds a communication bridge between customer and service provider. It is also an efficient way to collect feedbacks. (Stickdorn 2012, 198.)

To realize co-creation, another small workshop was arranged with the executive assistant of company X and a customer who has been interviewed before. The customer was invited again to discuss the concrete development ideas together with the member of staff of company X. The purpose of this workshop was to let customer and service provider involve in the service design process together, exchange ideas, and conclude the development ideas.

At the beginning of the workshop, the cultural theories (Lewis 2006, 141-152) and cultural dimensions (Hofstede 2010, 53-274) were simply introduced to the participants. Since the cultural elements involved in the service, the purpose of introducing culture related theories was to let the participants have a basic understanding on the root causes of cultural issues in the service and have more clues to develop ideas. The culture related theories could help the participants understand why the customers behave differently and expect differently. The development ideas were going to be categorized into several areas to reflect the culture related theories. For instance following culture related theories were going to be reflected: Power distance, Individualism - Collectivism, Uncertainty avoidance (Hofstede 2010, 53-274), Trust-building strategy (Lewis 2006, 141-152).

After a quick introduction of cultural theories, the focus moved to idea filtering. Since the raw development ideas have been categorized with the executive assistant of company X in idea-generation step, they were first shared with the customer. The additional explanations were also expressed to the customer. The purpose was to let the customer understand the progress of the service design process and have a general picture about the development ideas. Since a lot of development ideas came from customers, most of ideas were not strange to him. In the meanwhile, the possible new ideas from the customer were also allowed to be added to the idea board. As the ideas have been categorized into several parts, there was a clear structure for the customer to add new ideas into specific part.

After the customer got familiar with the ideas, a filtering work started. The filtering work was a main part in our co-creation, because an important purpose was to filter out the most feasible development ideas. A lot of valuable discussions and idea exchange between the customer and the member of staff of company X happened in this step which was the most important purpose of having the co-creation workshop. In the discussion, the customer and the member of staff from company X had a good opportunity to express their thoughts to each other. They shared their experience, expectations, suggestions to each other, and analyzed the feasibility of those ideas together.

The illustrations (part 1 and 2) show the ideas generated in the workshop (See illustration 10, Idea generation part1 and illustration 11, Idea generation part2 in Appendices). The similar ideas have been filtered out and regrouped into several categories.

## 7 Development Suggestions

After the co-work with the customer and the member of staff of company X, the concrete development ideas were generated. The development ideas could be simply divided into two parts - existing service enhancement and new development solutions. The cultural theories

(Lewis 2006, 141-152) and cultural dimensions (Hofstede 2010, 53-274) were reflected in some development suggestions.

Existing Service Enhancement:

#### 1) More regular and effective communication

According to the Individualism - Collectivism theory (Hofstede 2010, 89-133), Asian customers are more collectivism than European and North-American customers, which means that the loyalty to the group is more important in their eyes. They cannot accept the behaviors that break the rule in the group and they are more sensitive to be impacted by the unruly behaviors - for instance absence or inaction.

As agreed with the member of staff from company X and the customer, it will request the teachers to ensure the rule to be informed clearly and carried out strictly. The teachers have responsibility to help all the students understand the rule and active accordingly. Otherwise the unruly behaviors could impact the order in the classroom and quality of the integration training.

According to the Individualism - Collectivism theory (Hofstede 2010, 89-133), the people who are in individualism culture usually express their thoughts directly. In contrast, it is difficult for the people who are in collectivism culture - for instance Asian customers - to accept the direct disagreement in a public occasion. To solve a problem, compare with the solution, Asian customers care face-saving more. It will request the company X's teachers to carry out more regular and effective communication with Asian students. As agreed with the member of staff of company X and the customer, because of face-saving, it is better to have individual communication with Asian students and carry out the communication regularly to really understand what they think. Since Asian and African countries are low-trust societies (Lewis 2006, 145), their students will be more open and direct in the individual chat. A Trust-building strategy (Lewis 2006, 144) is needed to be established. The teachers could adjust their communication method to communicate with the students effectively.

#### 2) More care in treatment

According to Power Distance theory (Hofstede 2010, 53-86) the power distance is higher in Asian and African countries than European countries. The students from European and North American countries consider company X and the teachers on the same level with them, but in Asian and African students' eyes company X has more power than them and the teachers are on a higher stage than them. That's why they expect more help from the organization and



people who have more power. They know that Finland is an egalitarian society where everyone is treated equally. Many Asian and African students do not like the power distance in their own countries, in Finland, they expect the power distance to be shortened and they can be treated equally.

Based on the discussion with the member of staff from company X and the customer, the equal relationship thinking is going to be enhanced among the teachers, and a Trust-building strategy (Lewis 2006, 144) is going to be established in company X. The concrete actions could be that, the teachers are going to have real care when they treat the students wherever they come from, share open and transparent information with all students, recognize the progress and contribution of the students. If necessary, a Trust-repair system (Lewis 2006, 144) can be established to remedy the relationship between the teachers (service providers) and students (customers).

### 3) Variant teaching methods and clear instruction

According to the Uncertainty Avoidance theory (Hofstede 2010, 187-233), the students coming from some countries like Germany and Japan usually want to avoid uncertainty. They expect a clear guidance from teachers for their study. In contrast the students from North America might need more space for self-study. Based on these experiences from the member of staff of company X and the customers, it requests the teachers to adjust their teaching methods to meet the different study needs from the students. For the students in uncertainty avoidance culture, the teachers should provide the guidance clearly and rigorously. In contrast, the teachers could allow the students who need more space to have self-study and provide support when necessary. By having different teaching methods, the teachers could help the students learn Finnish efficiently.

Based on the feedbacks from the member of staff of company X and the customers, it also requests TE Toimisto to provide clear instruction to the applicants who register for the integration training service. For the customers who are in uncertainty avoidance culture, like Germany and Japan, they need a clear promise from TE Toimisto how long they have to wait to start the integration training. In the waiting period, they expect TE Toimisto to keep the promise and provide the service as agreed. If they have to wait longer than agreed, TE Toimisto must provide an explanation why the customers have to wait longer. Since there have been much misunderstanding between TE Toimisto and the customers regarding the waiting period, it is essential that TE Toimisto should establish a Trust-building strategy and Trust-repair system (Lewis 2006, 141-148). The concrete actions are very straightforward - provide clear instruction to the customers, keep promise, give official explanation timely when the plan changes.

## New Development Solutions:

### 1) Cultural training for teachers

To remind the importance of cultural matters to the teachers in company X, company X could carry out a series of training for the teachers. The purposes of the training are to remind the teachers the importance of culture in the service, have basic understanding on cultural theories - for instance Trust-building strategy between cultures (Lewis 2006, 141-148) and cultural dimensions (Hofstede 2010, 53-274) and have basic knowledge about different cultures.

The training can be carried out regularly, for instance once a quarter. Company X could invite the lecturer to provide the training, or organize a group of teachers to study cultural theories and share the knowledge with all other staffs. Another convenient and efficient way is to invite the existing multi-language staffs in company X to introduce their cultures and custom. Since company X has several multi-language staffs that come from Russia, Hungary, China and Vietnam, company X could utilize the good resources. It is cost-efficient and convenient to invite these staffs to share their experience and knowledge about the cultures.

To gain the knowledge about culture is necessary; the most important thing is to recognize the importance of the culture in the service. The recognition can be enhanced through the training, it is more important to keep it in mind in daily service. It will benefit the teachers to communicate with the students effectively and keep good relationships.

### 2) Organize cultural activities for students

Following the previous suggestion, the students in company X could also be a good resource to help the teachers understand the cultures. As discussed with the member of staff of company X, company X will create more stages for the students to introduce their own cultures and share their thoughts.

Company X has made some efforts to build stage for the students to share culture knowledge. For instance, company X has organized activities to invite the students to introduce their cultures in Finnish. It will make the integration training more interesting and abundant. It is a good way for the teachers and other students to understand the cultures. It is strongly suggested that company X should organize more similar activities. Company X should organize these activities more regularly and involve the students as many as possible. These activities will let the students understand each other better and help the students know more about the culture differences.

Besides the cultural activities, company X will also create other stages for communication and knowledge sharing. Company X has also done some efforts. For instance, company X opens blog web page and encourages the students to publish Finnish article to introduce their cultures and any other ideas. It is a good way to for the blog writers to practice their Finnish writing skill and express their thoughts. Company X has also had plan to cooperate with Selkouutiset and assign a student as part-time journalist. The journalist will have chance to publish article on the website of Selkouutiset. The topics can be wide - the daily life in company X, introduction of cultures, experience in Finland and so on. These activities are also strongly recommended as a communication channel is expected by both students and teachers. Company X's teachers could try to organize more activities to build the communication channel. It will give strong support to the training quality.

### 3) Strengthen cooperation with partners

Besides the suggestions about cultural matters, other general suggestions about company X's operation were also raised. The purpose was to improve the service quality.

The feedback from the member of staff of company X has reflected that the cooperation between company X and the partners - TE Toimisto and Testi Piste must be strengthened. Since company X and the partners are working in different locations, it usually takes some time to communicate and understand each other. The incorrect or out-of-date information of the students from TE Toimisto or Testi Piste usually cut off the connection between company X and the student; consequently the student's training time will be delayed.

To solve this problem, the member of staff from company X and the customer all suggested that company X and the partners should organize meeting to go through each other's working process. By getting familiar with each other's process, it will be easier to find where the problems exist. They should listen to each other's voice and understand the expectations. Company X expects TE Toimisto and Testi Piste to collect students' information accurately, update the changes timely and provide clear instruction to the integration training applicants and students. Company X will help TE Toimisto and Testi Piste improve the cooperation process, clear the division of work, and organize process review meeting when necessary. All the purposes are to improve cooperation efficiency and provide better service quality to the customers.

#### 4) Variant courses for customers

The executive assistant of company X raised the suggestion to open more variant trainings to meet the different needs from the customers. These suggestions also met the expectations from the customers in the interview.

A new series of training could be opened for the next generation of immigration to help them integrate into Finnish society. The current immigrants will have kids in Finland, to think long, company X could open integration training to meet the needs of those kids and teenagers. Through the training, they could understand Finnish culture and integrate at young age. This program could benefit Finnish society as well. The training will be very helpful for the further education and profession of young immigrants. It will bring more well-trained labors to Finnish labor market.

Since there were more and more international employees in Finland nowadays, company X could also cooperate with companies to open training for their foreign employees. This training could help these foreign employees improve Finnish language skill and develop their career in Finland which could also benefit Finland. Currently the foreign labors are mainly in several areas - IT, public transportation, construction, telecommunication and so on. By opening different profession specific trainings, the new services could meet more demands from the customers and at meanwhile benefit to company X's growth. For instance, company X has had training service for the laid-off employees of Nokia in the past. The training has helped those foreign ex-Nokia employees improve their Finnish language skill, find new jobs in Finland and continue their contribution to Finnish society. This kind of training service will bring win-win for company X, customers and Finnish society.

## 8 Discussion and Conclusion

A service provider should investigate customer's need from different aspects. Nowadays, the trend is that a service provider is serving customers who come from different regions. Culture is an important aspect that explains why the customers have different needs. The customers' cultural backgrounds affect their behaviors and demands. Cross-cultural customer service has been a mega trend in service industry.

Company X is a typical service organization who provides service to multi-culture customers. Their main service - Finnish integration training service is facing to the immigrants in Finland who come from all over the world. Considering culture as an important element and having basic knowledge about different cultures will help company X communicate with the custom-

ers effectively, understand customers' needs better and improve the service quality. To achieve these goals, a series of study are carried out.

Culture related theories (Lewis 2006, Hofstede 2010) are the main theoretical foundations to support the culture related study. Service-dominant logic is the leading concept for the service study. Service design process and methods (Stickdorn 2012, 120-212) are the main means to explore the service development opportunities and generate development ideas.

Service-dominant logic is the leading concept in this study. Co-creation supports the fieldwork with customer and service provider. Co-creation is implemented by working together with customer and service provider.

To explore the existing problems and development opportunities in the service, several customers of company X have been interviewed. By doing interviews with customers, a plenty of feedback have been collected. The customers' experiences in the service, the expectations and development suggestions have been included in the feedback. A field work has been carried out with the member of staff of company X. The service design process has been gone through with the member of staff of company X and related service design methods are used to explore the service problems and create development ideas. The culture related theories have been reflected in the design process. The customers' feedbacks have been shared with the member of staff of company X. The co-creation has been implemented by working together with the service provider and customer.

The purpose of the research was to collect feedback from the customers from different countries, co-create the development suggestions. It should be noticed that, due to the limited resources, the customers and service provider involved in the research were all Chinese. The point of view was more or less from Asian angle. It would be better to have customers from different countries involve in the research. To close the gap as much as possible, the member of staff from company X has shared her experiences about the students from all the different countries, and the Chinese interviewees also gave the feedback they have heard from other countries' students. More customers from different countries could be invited to the interview and the research could be deeper into service organization next time to obtain possibly better results.

Based on the study, the customer and service provider have heard each other's voice. The importance of cultural element has been identified. The main problems in the current service process have been pointed out. The development suggestions have been co-created with the member of staff of company X and the customer. The development suggestions cover two parts - current service enhancement and new development solutions.

Based on the development suggestions, company X could carry out development actions from several aspects - enhance current service by having regular and effective communication with students, considering cultural differences in treatment, using variant teaching methods and providing clear instruction to the students; implement new solutions by having cultural training for the teachers, organizing cultural activities for the students, strengthening cooperation with partners, opening variant training services for the customers.

Based on the study on company X's service, it can be concluded that the culture has become an important element in customer service industry. Cultural difference can be considered as a root cause of variant demands. Especially for the service organization that is facing to the cross-culture customers, investigating customer's culture background could be an important step of customer research. Although the customers speak different languages, understanding each other's culture will help service organization and customers speak the same language in service world. Cross-culture customer service will be an important trend in the following years.

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## Illustrations

Illustration 1, 2000 - 2013 Immigration Tendency in Finland (Official Statistics of Finland 4.2014).

Illustration 2, High- and Low-Trust Countries (Lewis 2006, 145).

Illustration 3, Low Trust (Lewis 2006, 146).

Illustration 4, Service Design Process and Related Methods.

Illustration 5, Finnish Integration Training Service Customer Journey Map.

Illustration 6, Persona A.

Illustration 7, Persona B.

Illustration 8, Persona C.

Illustration 9, Persona D.

Illustration 10, Idea generation part1.

Illustration 11, Idea generation part2.

## Tables

Table 1, Conceptual transitions (Vargo Lusch 2006).

## Appendices

## Persona A


**NAME:** Wang  
**AGE:** 28  
**NATIONALITY:** Chinese  
**MARITAL STATUS:** Married  
**OCCUPATION:** Accountant  
**HOBBIES:** Reading

**EXPERIENCE:** 4 years working experience in China.  
 Moved to Finland with husband.  
 Had education in China.  
 Speaks English.


**EXPECTATIONS:** Have integration training.  
 Learn Finnish.  
 Have hitaasti etenevä kotoutus koulutus.  
 Make friends in Finland.

**DAILY LIFE:** Learn Finnish.  
 Looking for job in Finland.

**LONG TERM PLAN:** Find an accountant job in Finland.  
 Have a further education in Finland.  
 Speak Finnish fluently.



Persona B



**NAME:** Mohammeel  
**AGE:** 38  
**NATIONALITY:** Somali  
**MARITAL STATUS:** Married  
**OCCUPATION:** No  
**HOBBIES:** sports


**EXPERIENCE:** 6 kids. Came to Finland as refugee.  
Wife has no job. Live with ~~public~~ relief.  
Speaks only native language.

**EXPECTATIONS:** Learn Finnish language.  
Need advanced course for driver.  
Luku- ja kirjoitustaidon koulutus.  
Find a taxi or bus driver job in Finland.

**DAILY LIFE:** Take care of kids.

**LONG TERM PLAN:** stay in Finland.  
Have stable income.

Persona C



**NAME:** Tatiana  
**AGE:** 26  
**NATIONALITY:** Russian  
**MARITAL STATUS:** Married  
**OCCUPATION:** No  
**HOBBIES:** Cooking Travelling

**EXPERIENCE:** Graduated student.  
Have a master degree in Russia.  
No working experience.  
Came to Finland after graduate.


**EXPECTATIONS:** Looking for job in Finland.  
Learn Finnish and find a job.  
Or have a further education in Finland.  
Perus-linja (kotoutumis koulutus).

**DAILY LIFE:** Collect information about open positions and education in Finland.

**LONG TERM PLAN:** Have a Finnish education certificate.  
Have a long term working contract in Finland.



Persona D



**NAME:** Andrei  
**AGE:** 50  
**NATIONALITY:** Romanian  
**MARITAL STATUS:** Married  
**OCCUPATION:** IT expert  
**HOBBIES:** Reading watching movie

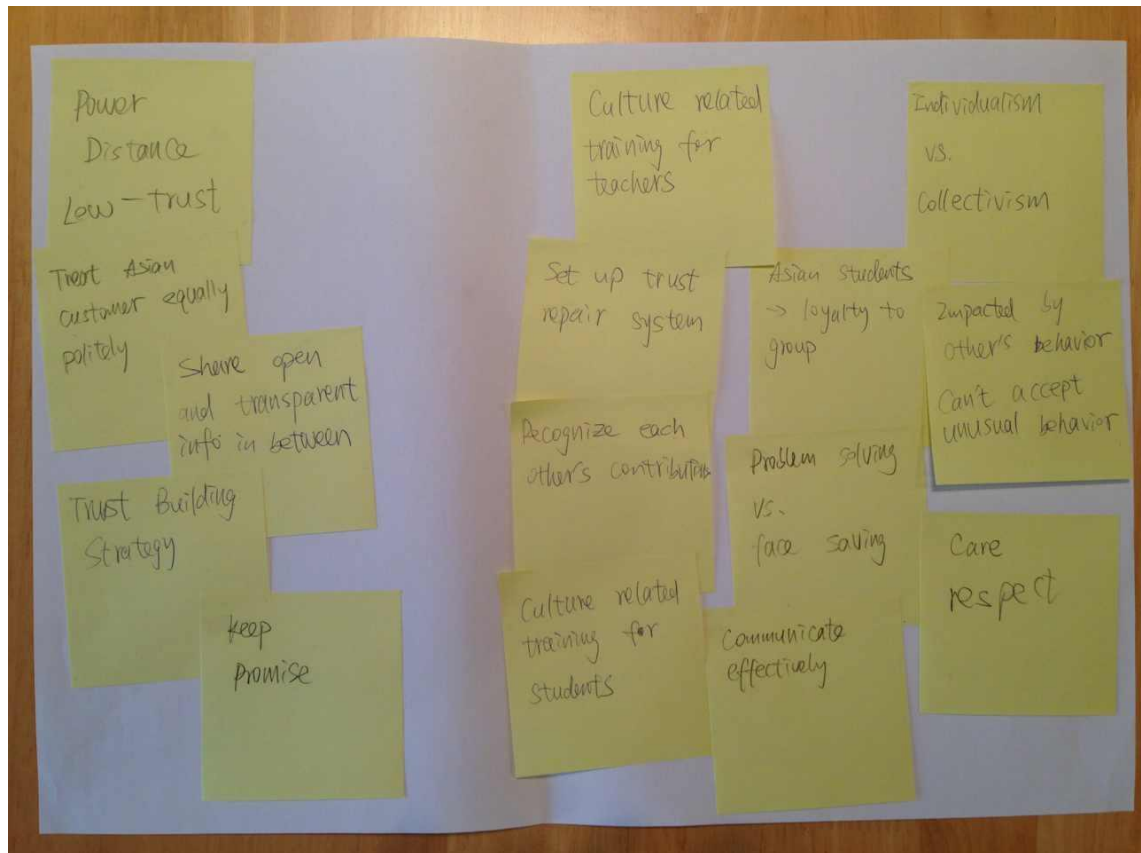
**EXPERIENCE:** 25+ years working experience in IT.  
IT solution manager in Nokia.  
Laid off by Nokia 2 years ago.  
Living in Finland over 10 years.  
Have basic ~~knowledge~~ knowledge about Finnish language.

**EXPECTATIONS:** Need systematic training about Finnish.  
Need IT specific Finnish language training.  
Nopea - luoja.

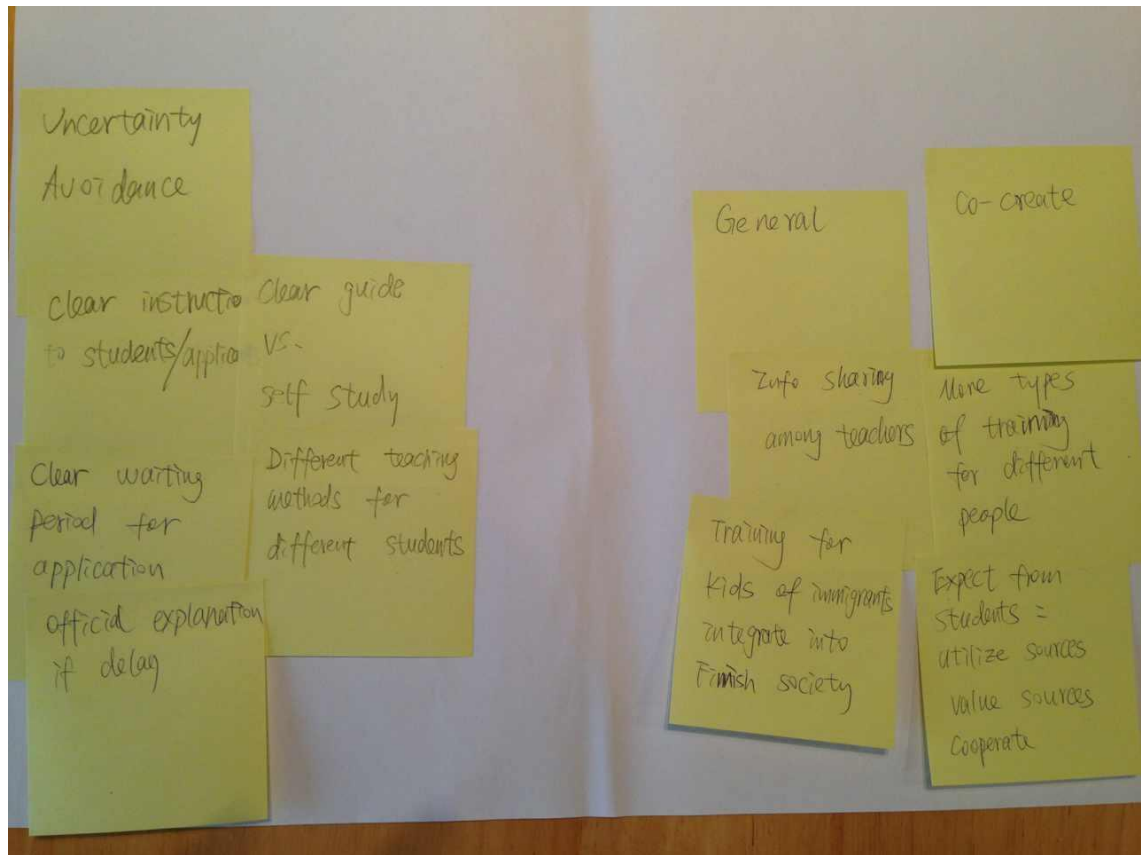
**DAILY LIFE:** Follow IT related news.  
Update IT related knowledge.  
Looking for business opportunity in Finland.

**LONG TERM PLAN:** Improve Finnish language.  
Run own business - IT solution company.

Idea generation part1



Idea generation part2





## Appendix 1

### Customer Interview Questions

1. What was the application process when you applied for Finnish integration training service? How long did you wait to start the integration training?
2. What was the content of Finnish integration training service? Did the service help you?
3. The students came from different countries. Was there any difficulties caused by multi-cultures?
4. How did you feel other students' behaviors in the class? Were you influenced or impacted by other people's behaviors?
5. What did you do in practice work phase? How did you find a part time job? Was it difficult for you to find such job to practice your Finnish language?
6. What was your expectation before you started the integration training? Did you achieve the goal after graduate?
7. Did you have any specific needs in the integration training? For example, did you expect specific advanced training for your occupation in Finland?
8. Did you have any personal difficulties during the integration training? Did you find the solutions?
9. Is there any development needed for integration training service? Do you have any suggestions to develop the service?

## Appendix 2

### Service Provider Interview Questions

1. When students have some suggestions/ideas on the course, it might need the teachers to change their traditional way of teaching. How do you or other teachers deal with the new ideas or different opinions from the students? Do you discuss with those students and try to find a solution to fulfill each other's requirement?
2. Students' behavior and thought will effect on the course and their study. Their behaviors are basically influenced by their cultural backgrounds. Company X's students come from different countries and have different cultural backgrounds. Do you have any difficulty to face to the different cultures and how do you deal with them? Do you have any ideas or suggestions how company X could adjust teaching methods to reduce the impact of cultural differences?
3. Do company X's teachers collect feedback from students regularly? If yes, how often and when (when = after a whole course finished, or whenever students give feedback, or...) do you collect feedback? How do you collect feedback - face-to-face talk, email, questionnaire or?
4. How company X deal with students' feedback? Will company X make change according to the feedback?
5. Do company X teachers share thoughts about teaching methods regularly? If yes, how often do you share ideas, any regular meeting for this purpose? Does it help to the teaching?
6. Is there any challenge for you to cooperate with other internal and external department/organization? If yes, do you have any expectation or suggestion to develop the cooperation?
7. Do you think there are some areas that company X could develop to make the teaching running more smoothly? Do you have any suggestion? Do you or company X need support from any department or organization to realize your thoughts?
8. Do you have any expectation or suggestion to the students to make the teaching more effectively?